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ACROSS THE NEAR EAST

Kshitish Chandra Banerjee

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Preface

I feel indeed a great pleasure to place to-day this my second book of travels before the Public who, I hope, will receive it in the same spirit of hospitality and comradeship with which they received their young adventurer during his travels. It is some four years and five months back that I made the daring venture to undertake my tour on foot from Assam with a paltry sum of only eleven rupees in my pocket. After covering about 9125 miles on foot I took a bicycle on which I continued my journey and brought an end to my first tour in March, 1936, after travelling in all the far eastern countries. On recording my thrilling experiences and impressions of the social, economic and political conditions of all these lands in a book entitled "*My Travels in the East*" I set out again on my journey on a bicycle and this time to the West. And this book tells of my travels in the Near East and it also speaks of the social, economic and political conditions in those countries. As the book had to be hurried through the press, errors of various kinds may have crept in, which, I hope with all apologies, my friends and admirers, especially the reading public, will overlook. In this connection I shall be failing in my duty if I do not accord my heartiest thanks to Mr. Nishi Kanto Das who has helped

me in so many ways to bring out the book. It will be an act of ingratitude on my part if I fail to take this opportunity for paying my humblest but sincerest thanks and respect to H. H. the Maharajas of Benares, Indore, Jodhpur and to H. H. the Nawab of Bhopal, all of whom highly appreciated my enterprising spirit. I also to-day remember with gratitude all those good souls whom I happened to meet at home and abroad and whose friendly assistance helped me not a little to carry out successfully the programme of my tour—to each one of them I take up this opportunity to-day for offering my greetings of love and respect. At this moment I also feel an urge from within to pay my humble tribute of love and respect to the greatness of Mahatma Gandhi and to our revered Malavyaji, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Sir N. N. Sircar and others whose letters of appreciation inspired me now and then with hope and courage when my spirit failed and despondency came over me in the countries far, far away from the land of my birth.

In conclusion I must convey my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Mr. S. P. Mookerjee, Vice-Chancellor, Calcutta-University, who has so kindly contributed a Foreword to this my humble book.

Calcutta, }
26th April,
1938.

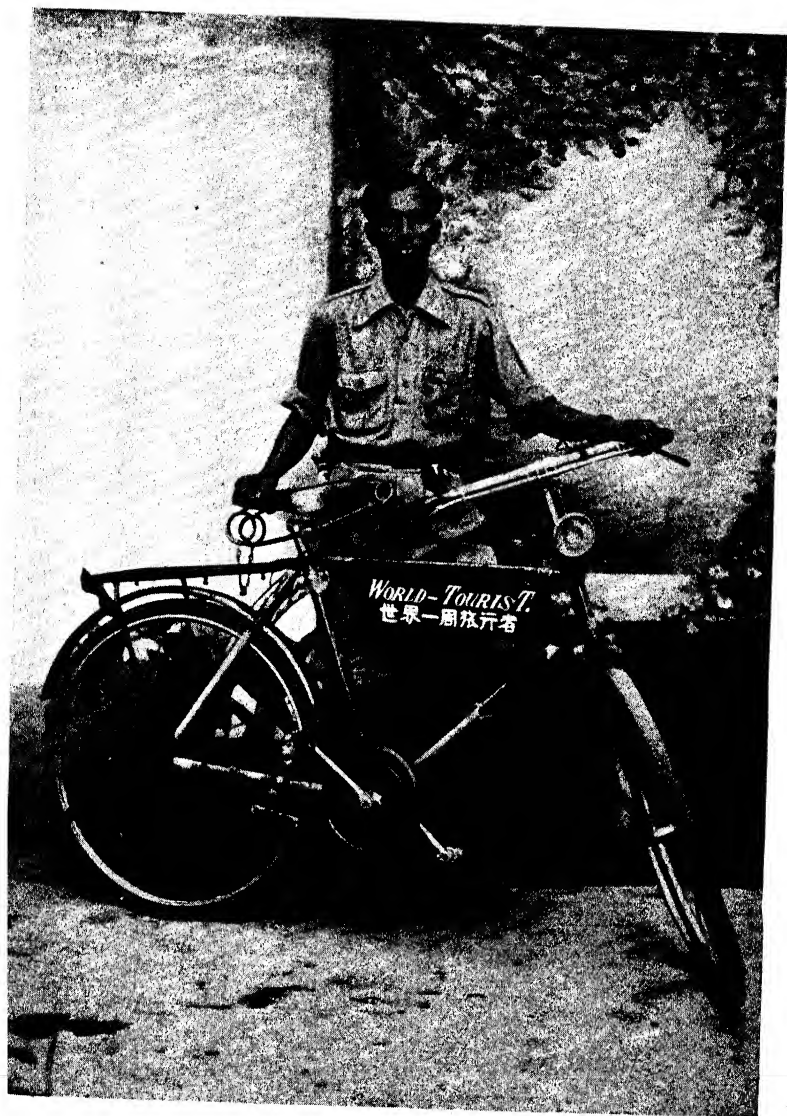
THE AUTHOR.

Foreword

It is indeed a great pleasure to me to introduce Mr. Kshitish Chandra Banerjee, a young enterprising Bengalee, who has recorded his thrilling experiences in this book in a language, simple and lucid. I have no doubt this book of his travels will be read with interest and profit by all sections of the public and will help in rousing in the minds of many an active desire to travel far and wide, unmindful of the risks involved, imbued with courage and dauntlessness.

3rd April, }
1938.
Calcutta.

*Vice-Chancellor,
University of Calcutta.*



THE AUTHOR

Born :—

Feb. 1912

IRAN

IRAN

While on board the S. S. "Vasna" of the British Indian Steam Navigation Company which alone is authorised by the authorities of the Persian Gulf to run passenger ships in the Gulf between Basrah in Iraq and Bombay, I made acquaintances with several Iranians and some Bengali Mohammedan crew of the boat. Most of my time I used to spend in the company of those Iranians some of whom were returning from Rangoon after a long time to take up the course of military training in their country. Young and energetic, all of them could speak English which helped us to enjoy mutual companionship. I was very inquisitive to know of modern Iran, and so one morning I asked the "Sareng", an old Bengali Mohammedan, about his impressions of Iran wherefor I was bound. To this he replied after a little silence in the following terms : "Iran has gone to hell. The women of the country do no more wear veils. They talk and mix up freely with any one they like, and so their standard of morality has gone lower. The people no more believe in their holy "*Koran*" and they do not care to visit mosques regularly for offering 'nemaj'. In a word, they are to-day almost christianised". I could not but feel pained to hear of

his impressions—impressions which, I know, are more or less shared by many other Indian Mohammedans.

After six days of smooth and rough voyage, the boat entered the waters of Bushire in the afternoon of the 19th May, 1937. The weather was fine. There was not a speck of cloud on the sky. The sun had gone down the western horizon when the boat anchored in the mid-sea wherefrom a faint line of the town of Bushire came in view. The sea was calm and quiet. Presently came two small steam launches with a doctor and some Customs officers. Many of the passengers who were greatly delighted at the sight of the town turned rather pale when they looked at the yellow flags flying on the steam launches which indicated that the passengers were to be kept confined in the Quarantine which means a regular Jail, if not worse. However, the doctor came soon on board and took away all the passports and then asked us to get into the launch. The bags and baggages of the passengers were carried into it by the Iranian porters belonging to the Customs House. The sea was shallow and moreover there was, so to speak, no proper harbour where the ships could get in, and this is the reason why all ships have to anchor in the mid-sea.

Now, the small launch moved on with us representing the people of the two nationalities, Indian and Iranian. Amongst the passengers one was an Indian who was going to Bushire to take up the post of the Assistant Engineer of the Persian Gulf and there were several second class and some deck passengers. There was not

enough space for accommodation of all the passengers in the launch, and so we all put up huddled together. Beside me sat an Iranian couple whom I accompanied from Bombay. The lady had a veil on all along, but as soon as the boat reached the waters of Bushire, she put it off. Now I felt simply amazed to see her by my side in European costume with a fashionable hat on. She had bobbed hair and looked as smart as any European woman. While on board, she always kept herself confined to a secluded place behind a screen like a Purdah-woman, but now with change of environments she was a different creature, adapting herself quickly to the change. Her face betrayed no signs of delicacy or puzzle when she found herself in the company of so many men. It set me seriously a-thinking how she could manage so easily to compromise with the changed environments. However, we went on talking on interesting subjects and sometimes joking too. Thus, we were killing time. The launch, of course, moved on in the same speed, and after some time she stopped before a country-boat which was waiting for carrying the passengers ashore. The land was still a mile off from this place. The sea here was too shallow to allow the launch to proceed any further. So, we removed to the boat. It was too small to accommodate so many passengers at a time, and hence two trips were required. Unfortunately this boat also could not get much near the shore. It remained at a place, some half a mile away from the land. So, a smaller boat was sent to carry the first batch of passengers

ashore, but to our surprise it also could not proceed much further. The male passengers, finding no other alternative, had, therefore, to get down in the water and to walk to the shore, while the female members were carried by the boatmen on their shoulders. Now, the second batch which included also myself did not much favour the idea of boarding the smallest boat. We all got down and found ourselves in knee-deep water. We waded through, some with shoes on and some without. It is impossible to describe how painful it was to walk about half a mile on the sea-bed full of broken shells and stones. However, we reached the shore at last, all tired and disgusted, myself with tears in eyes. My feet had many bad cuts, some of which were still bleeding. Soon we came to our houses which were mud-built but well-furnished. Each house comprised two rooms, and each had in it two beds. The room in which we were housed had five occupants, three of whom were Iranians. Two of us having no beds made use of the beds referred to above while the rest slept on the carpeted floor. The rooms had a few windows which let in throughout day and night fresh sea breezes of which we had much need. By this time we became very thirsty and equally hungry, but unhappily could find no water because of its dearth in this small island. Naturally, for the time being we fell to criticising the Quarantine authorities for their sheer negligence in the matter. And to our surprise, no officer was found to whom we could make a complaint of. There was only a Chowkidar to look after the

passengers. We asked this illiterate care-taker, who was after all a good soul, for some water which was brought about an hour later. The sun had in the meantime gone down the sea, dyeing the sky with varied colours of his rays and leaving us to darkness. After quenching our thirst with the water we retired to our room. There was no differentiation in regard to treatment meted out to different classes of passengers. Although pinched with hunger, we had to wait for a good long time for our meals. At about nine the Chowkidar came to serve us dinner consisting of big wheat breads, Polao, chicken-curry and curd. Naturally, we were over-joyed at the sight of such palatable dishes and the care-taker had our heartiest thanks, because none of us had expected such royal dish in this solitary island.

Next morning with the sudden touch of a friend of mine I awoke from sleep and found our breakfast ready on the table. The entire room was flooded with the sweet rays of the morning sun. So, I was in a hurry to wash my hands and face and to sit around the table with my friends for our breakfast ; it consisted of thick as well as thin wheat bread along with salted cheese, boiled eggs and tea. Tea in Iran is prepared without milk, but we were rather fortunate to have it prepared with milk. Now, when the breakfast was over, my friends left for collecting sea-shells in the water and myself for a stroll along the long and broad sea beach. It is a flat sandy island with hardly any tree visible. I walked on and on, sometimes along the rocky shore

and sometimes over the heaps of small broken shells till I came to the end of the island. Standing here I had, on the opposite shore, a distinct view of Bushire, and in the distance a faint dark line was speaking of a range of high mountains. The sea ahead was very narrow. At some places the sandy bed of the sea had risen above the water level. Some sea-birds were hovering over my head chirping in their heart's joy, but ere long they flew away leaving me 'alone and unfriended.' Seated on a rock here, I was quite unaware when I lost myself in the beauties of nature. Suddenly I felt sweating which brought me to my own self. The sun had meanwhile gone up the horizon and I could no longer stay in the sun. On returning to my room I found my room mates engaged in playing at cards. With my entrance into the room, my friends gathered round me just to show their collection of nice shells of varied colours and sizes, among which a number of lovely conch-shells attracted me specially. This over, I also joined with them in their play just to divert time till we were called for lunch. The menu was as inviting as it was in the previous night.

Now playing and now chatting with my fellow-brothers I killed my time in the Quarantine. My young Iranian friends were very talkative, but their talks did not go over any wide range of subjects—their main topic of discussion being confined to the film-stars of Hollywood, who, probably, were their life's stars too. I will not make secret of the fact that

my first impression of the young men of Iran was none too high. But I had to revise my opinion later on. It is, I understood afterwards, a mistake to form an impression of a country and its people from contact with only a limited few who cannot possibly represent the country in all its perspectives. I had to learn, and happily enough, an entirely different lesson, when I had the privilege of friendly association with the enlightened young men and women of the country.

The following morning the doctor came to the island to examine whether we had been suffering from any contagious disease, such as Plague, cholera and small pox. I frankly confess, it was beyond my intelligence to understand why the Iranian Government sent us at all to the Quarantine when all of us had in our possession the inoculation certificates for those diseases and without which when no passenger was allowed to embark for Iran from India. Being called, however, we produced one by one all our certificates before the doctor who entered our names and other particulars in his book, and then left the island after collecting from every one of us twenty rials (Twenty *shahies* make one *rial*; Ten rials make one *Toman*. Six rials make one rupee in Iran, but outside Iran about ten rials make a rupee.) as his fee. The doctor was an amiable gentleman, and his behaviour with us was throughout friendly.

Next morning with the day-break a thrill ran through my entire body out of joy—a joy arising from a hope of freedom from the chains of the Quarantine.

After breakfast we paid up the Quarantine hotel bill which cost each of us only twenty rials for three days. Now, we kept eagerly awaiting a launch to leave for the town. And before long the sound of the propelling of a steam launch took us with joy. The tide of the sea being in favour, a country boat had an easy way up to the shore, and thus saved us from the sort of trouble we had on the day of arrival. The boat was big enough to accommodate all of us. So, we all boarded the boat and left for the mid-sea where the launch had cast her anchor. The bags and baggages were left behind to be carried by the boatmen in the next trip. The launch steamed off as soon as we boarded. After about half an hour's run the launch changed her course and began to run close by the side of the town. The town now presented quite a different picture from the one we had from a distance. The buildings, I came to notice, were old and small, and they were of mud-brick make. Many of the buildings had collapsed, some partially and some totally. Curiously enough, I noticed no activity whatsoever for the reconstruction of those buildings. Many big country boats were found along the shore, some were being unloaded while others with heavy loads were leaving for the ships standing in the mid-sea. The coolies looked all jolly and active, and many of them were singing in their heart's joy. As I was not conversant with their tongue, very little did I understand of their songs. The launch, of course, was going on her way all the while, and soon she stopped

before a big country boat, a little way off from the Customs House. A crowd of Indians gathered at the station to receive their near and dear ones, but there was none for me. And who would come to receive a person who had been moving from country to country alone and unknown just to satisfy his ambition ? None of them exchanged a word with me, nor did I. Like other passengers I was also waiting in the sun for my luggage. There was no shed here to shelter the passengers from sun and shower. Shortly afterwards all the baggages were brought down from the launch, and over a bag there arose a quarrel between two porters, culminating in a regular fight. The people around and also the watchmen on duty were enjoying the scene till two other watchmen from the crowd came forward to intervene. We now left for the Customs office where we were accommodated in a small room with our baggages. A little while after, several clerks belonging to the Customs office came to examine our boxes to search for the dutiable goods.

I had a film camera in my case, and so I began to feel rather ill at ease. Evidently my uneasiness was due to an apprehension lest it be discovered. At last my wicked mind worked well in the situation. A camera is not a dutiable good in other countries, but in Iran photography by outsiders being strictly prohibited, the Customs authorities generally do not let the bearer carry it in the country without the permit of the authorities. However, making some disorder within my case I asked one of the porters to carry it outside.

And almost simultaneously I demanded very gravely of one of the clerks to explain why they did not put a mark of their examination on my case, and without a word he did it then and there. This was because the disorderly things in the box made him convinced that it had already been examined by one of his brother clerks who might have forgotten, in the midst of hurry, to put a mark of his examination on the case. Thus, I made my way easy out of the Customs office. On coming out I met those Iranian friends of mine who kept waiting for me. There were at the stand a score of taxi-cabs and some hackney carriages. However, without loss of time I began, in the company of my friends, to walk along the dirty road leading to a market. On our right there stood a number of small mud-brick buildings many of which were almost in a collapsible condition and on our left were found many packed motor-cars in the open, because there was no shed belonging to the Customs office where their goods could be housed. We walked on and on right along the road till we came to a crossing whence we turned to left and soon found ourselves in a motor-garage. It was one of the principal garages where many motor-cars and lorries were usually kept. The building, though not large, had two small rooms on its roof. These rooms were always at the disposal of the guests for a daily rent of only two rials per room. We engaged one of them and put up rather huddled together, the other being already occupied by a visitor. There were, of course, several hotels in the town, but I did not care to stop in any of them,

as I would not possibly find there any English-speaking person. However, after putting all our belongings in order we locked up the door of the room and set out for the Police-station to report of our arrival as was required by the Police-regulation of Iran. The law of the country requires of every visitor, irrespective of nationality, to call at the police-station within forty-eight hours of his arrival, and this rule is in force even in villages. At the police-station I had to submit three of my unmounted photographs. They examined also my special tourist card which was granted free of charge by the consular authorities along with my visa in Bombay. They enquired if I had any camera with me, and warned me against taking any photograph of Iran without the permission of the Government. After questioning me for about an hour on this and that, they set me free to proceed to the Customs office to take back my Passport which was till then lying with the passport-clerk. On noting down in my Passport and also in their office book the amount of money I had then in my possession the clerk returned my passport without a word. The reason why the authorities note down the amount of money in the Passport is that a visitor is under no circumstances allowed to leave the country with more money. Again, no one is allowed to carry into Iran from outside more than two hundred rials, and exactly in the same way, at the time of his exit from the country he cannot carry with him more than that amount. Evidently, by such regulation the country is economically benefited.

Having obtained my Passport back I left the office, and entered a small restaurant for lunch. The waiter came to me, but being unable to follow my tongue left for calling the manager who promptly came. I asked him in Hindusthani to serve me a plate of polao and some fish curry which were immediately served. I was also supplied with a spoon and a fork. Close by my side sat some Iranians who also were taking rice, big wheat-breads and curries along with some green vegetables. Here what seemed most unusual to me was the habit of drinking from the same glass. Not long afterwards they broke their silence and asked me how I felt in their midst. They began first in Persian and then in Hindusthani which, I noticed, they knew quite well. After a proper reply I asked them, out of curiosity, how and where they had learnt our language. I was told that they had learnt to speak the language from the Indian soldiers who had been there for a long time during the Great War. It is why many people of this part of the country, particularly of this town, who had to come in intimate contact with the Indian soldiers, have a grasp of the Indian language. However, after enjoying their company for a long while I got up, and after payment of the bill which cost me only two rials, I left for my lodge.

In the afternoon I set out on my byke for a look round the town, and it took me only half an hour to have a circuit round the different localities. It is an undeveloped town, containing narrow streets and lanes, most of which are too dirty to be described. The

buildings are small and built of sunned bricks. The town has a population of about twentyfive thousand, but there is no arrangement for water-supply for which the citizens suffer miserably. The poor people of the town who can ill afford to pay for the construction of a well

are the worst victims of this great
Bushire scarcity of sweet water. These people have got to buy water from the hawkers who draw it from the wells outside the town. This is why many people cannot have bath even once in a fortnight ; of course, the rich people can have it in the *Hamams* (Public bath-houses) by paying two rials or so.

While strolling along a principal road I found a big play-ground in the vicinity of the town where many boys were playing foot-ball which is the most favourite game of the Iranians. I stopped there for a while to watch their game. Every one was dressed in European costume, and they were playing with boots on. After a few minutes I moved on, and soon found myself walking along the high way beside the beach in the other outskirt of the town. Having walked a long distance I felt tired, and so I sat on a big piece of wood lying beside the road. By this time the sun had already gone down, but the coloured rays of the sun were still visible on the thin clouds on the deep blue sky. The full-moon with all her charms and beauties became conspicuous and shed her light all over the landscape. The distant island where I had some memorable days to pass and where I had an experience

of the Quarantine life came distinctly in view with the dark line of a range of high mountains standing far beyond the land. A soft breeze was blowing, causing small waves in the sea and carrying with it messages of many a known and unknown land. The cool but bright moonlight all over, the lovely scenery of the island and the mountains afar, and the solemn stillness of the night prevailing around—all combined to create a charming scenery, and I could not know when I lost myself amidst the beauties of nature. A long time had thus fled quite unnoticed before I came to my senses. When I came back to my room, none of my friends, I found, were awake. There was stillness everywhere. A wax-candle was still burning, but it reached its last stage. I hastened to spread a small mat, and on it a blanket, but in the meantime the light went out. The cries of some people brought me to the verandah wherefrom I found about half a dozen persons of all ages making merry in the compound. They sat around a big earthen pot containing fire, and were smoking opium by turns, often bursting into laugh. It continued till very late hours of the night. Such parties of opium-smokers come to notice every morning and evening almost everywhere.

Next morning I could not find any sweet water to use, and so I entered a restaurant. Here I got a glass of drinking water which I used for washing my hands and face. My breakfast here consisted of two boiled eggs, a big but thin wheat-bread accompanied with salted cheese and sugar, and two cups of tea. It

cost me only a rial. After the breakfast was over, I called on the city authorities to know of the road leading to Shiraz, the neighbouring city. Shiraz stands at a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles from this town. The road, I was told, was a wretched one ; so I arranged with the authorities of a garage who used to run their motor-lorries between Shiraz and Bushire for sending my suit-case to Shiraz. This day also I had no bath for lack of sweet water, although I was badly in need of it. As a matter of fact, my condition was rather awful having had no bath for about a week. However, after lunch I left the town on my byke for the city of Shiraz at about eleven. Soon I reached the outskirt of the town whence I could find no road to take. So, I stopped to enquire. Just then a motor-lorry bound for Shiraz ran by my side across the rocky field, reminding me of the words of an Indian who in reply to my query regarding roads in Iran told me rather humorously, "Here in Iran everyone has got to make his own road." However, without wasting any time I began to proceed along the way made by the motor-lorry. The road being uneven, I felt tremendous jerkings on my byke all the way over till I reached a police outpost where I was stopped by a police-man who took me to his officer. Here my Passport was examined after which I was allowed to proceed on. The officer was innocent of English, and so, what he wanted to make me understand, he did all by gestures. An Iranian or a foreigner, every one who leaves for Shiraz has got to show his Passport or his

identification card here. After a few minutes I began my journey again. There lay ahead of me a sandy desert with no trace of any tree within sight. Now and then a sultry wind was blowing, causing a burning sensation on my face. Thus, I pushed on and on till I found a high way after about an hour's journey at the other end of this small desert. Looking at the road, I felt relieved to some extent, but before long I was disillusioned. I began to experience more inconveniences in cycling along this wretched way. The stones on it raised all their heads above the earth, and hence were the inconveniences for a cyclist to cycle. However, soon I reached a hut where I halted for having rest. In that hut lived an old fellow who used to entertain the visitors with tea or curd. Here I took a glass of cold drink which put, so to speak, new blood in my veins. After about an hour I left the place. Now I began to pass through fields some of which had still thin wheat-crops on them. The plants were of stunted growth and contained little grains. In many of these fields the peasants were busy reaping the harvest. Many asses were found pasturing in the fields; they were for carrying crops. The ass is the domestic animal of the villagers, nay, their life, because asses here not only carry loads of goods from place to place, but also carry persons. The villages are situated at long distances from one another. In some villages the houses lie congested surrounded by a single wall, while in others they are found scattered, each having a wall around. The houses present a very poor outlook,

and they always speak of the poverty of the people to the visitors. This being so, a visitor has not to take the trouble of making any enquiry to know of their economic condition. However, as I began to advance towards the long range of mountains which now came distinctly in view, more fertile lands began to greet me from both sides. Almost every field, I found, had a well from which water was being drawn with the help of horses to be diverted by narrow drains to different portions of the fields. Amidst this scenery I went on. Towards the evening I reached a small village, and entered a small tea-shop to quench my thirst. So thirsty I was that in no time I drank as many as five cups of tea prepared without milk. Of course, such five cups make one big tea cup of our country. Each cup of tea cost me only three *shahies*. The darkness of the night had meanwhile overlapped the earth, and so I stopped in this village to pass the night in the Police-station. It is a small village of about a hundred huts lying at the foot of the range of mountains. It had no wall whatsoever. It was at one time, I heard, the abode of the notorious people who used to fall upon the strangers to rob them of their purse. But such things no longer happen in this part of the country to-day. There is a military-outpost here to maintain peace and tranquillity of the locality, and hence the people can travel without fear even at dead of night.

Early next morning I set out, and after cycling for about two hours I reached the foot of the mountain. From this place I began to ascend, sometimes by

pedalling and sometimes on foot, along the motor-road. At considerable distances up the mountain I began to come across small inns just beside the road. In one of such inns I entered after a long journey, and asked the old inn-keeper for a glass of water, first in English and then in Hindusthani, but neither could he follow. Close by I found a dozen persons seated on a mat, chatting and smoking opium. Most of these men seemed to be drivers of the motor-lorries standing on the road just beside the inn. All these inns are made of date leaves, and many of them look, as it were, hanging on the lap of the mountain. However, from the midst of these people came forward an old fellow and asked me to tell him what I wanted. He understood me quite well as he knew the Indian language. After a little rest I sat for my lunch. It consisted of a plate of *polao* and roasted chicken for which I was charged only three rials. A bit to my surprise, in this small inn also I was given a spoon and a fork. After meal I soon left the place, but before leaving I could not help thanking the old fellow from the bottom of my heart for the palatable dish he had served me at such a cheap price and at such a place. All the day over I was proceeding on, sometimes cycling and sometimes walking up the mountain. All these mountains are absolutely barren, and nowhere had I come across any green grass or any shady tree to shelter me from the scorching sun of a summer day. At many places over these mountains are found charcoal shops. For want of coal the people of Iran have to

depend on charcoal, and so it is a flourishing and profitable business of the mountain people. The people do not, generally, use dry wood for domestic purposes ; hence in many places in the mountains the people are found burning trees to make charcoal.

After the day's journey I felt too tired to push on any further. The road was not paved. The city was still far away from the place. Almost against my mind I pushed on with all my strength. At dusk while cycling down a mountain at a high speed I suddenly drew up the brake of my byke at a bend in order to regulate the speed for turning round, but could not succeed due to the looseness of the brake unnoticed before. I fell rolling violently down the mountain into a ditch and found myself in a semi-conscious state. I could not exactly know how long I had been in that

**An
accident**

state, but when I came to my senses, I found myself in a motor-lorry. I was now at an altitude of about six thousand feet above the sea-level. There was no more ascending now. The lorry was running down very cautiously, and soon stopped before an inn just at the foot of the mountain beside a water-fall. Many a green tree has grown up here, and has made the place a lovely one. With the help of the driver I got down here to drink some water and to wash a small cut on my head, which was still bleeding, along with some bruises here and there. In this inn we had our dinner, and after some rest we got into the car again. I was feeling much cold, but I had then no warm clothes to

cover my body with. The driver was, however, courteous enough to make a voluntary offer of his overcoat which I most gratefully accepted. I was then not in a condition to sit on. So, I prostrated myself on the bags, but had no sleep owing to a severe pain all over my body. At mid-night the lorry reached the vicinity of the city, and here we stopped before the police-outpost, where my passport along with the driver's license and identification card was examined. The police officer took a note also of my address in the city, after which we were allowed to enter Shiraz. We began to pass along a very broad road. The doors of the buildings on either side were closed, and the streets looked deserted. There was stillness everywhere. Before long the lorry stopped before a hotel. I got down and was then conducted to a small but well-furnished room ; the charge was only eight rials a day. Before I bade good-bye to the driver, I paid him five *Tomans* in recognition of his kindness and affection, and conveyed to him my gratefulness. But for his goodness, it might be that I would have died there unknown and unwept. However, I retired to bed after washing with hot water all my wounds. It was half past one when the hotel boy came to me with some medicine for my use.

Shiraz stands on a plain at an altitude of about five thousand feet above the sea-level, surrounded by small hills. It has a population of about a hundred thousand. It enjoys an invigorating climate. The streets are wide and they run straight. On both sides of them are found

rows of shady trees. The buildings are small and not of modern type. As in Bushire, the scarcity of water is keenly felt here, and the poor people are the worst sufferers, many of whom have to use drain water for cleaning utensils and for other domestic purposes.

This drain-water looks very clean due
Shiraz to the constant flowing of mountain-water through the drains. Many poor people draw their drinking water from the drains at mid night, probably because it remains more clean at that hour. The system of watering the streets is also anything but scientific. Water is collected in small buckets for the purpose. This process requires more time as well as more expenses.

Next morning after breakfast I called on the British Consulate, and here I had some pleasant talks with Khan Saheb, the Pro-consul, who, though an Afghan by birth, spent his youth in India. He was an Indian in every respect. On my way back to the hotel from the Consulate I happened to meet a young Iranian just on the street who almost forced me, although in a friendly manner, to accompany him. I began to follow him quite blindly without knowing why he was so zealous. He was ignorant of English, but yet he understood me probably from the sign-board on my byke. All the way he kept smiling, but still I could detect on his face a shadow of regret for his being unable to speak with me. With him I soon entered an office and there I was introduced by him to the officer who extended to me a hearty welcome. This gentleman knew English,

and so he began to assail me with a volley of questions regarding my travels. Meanwhile he informed some press-representatives by a phone who almost immediately came up. Then followed some questions and with them my answers on the social and political condition of India. So curious were their questions that I could not help being astonished. Almost every question they put to me showed their lack of information about Indian affairs. I began to take delight, as I always do, in explaining to them the true aspect of the changed political and socio economic conditions of my country. Thus, I passed an hour in their pleasant company, and then left for a "Hamam" accompanied by the gentleman who introduced me to those people. We soon entered a small house and went down to the under-ground floor. There was a hair-cutting saloon, and beside it I found a dressing room close to the bath room which was fitted with a big cemented tub, full of hot water, and two showers. On my entrance into the bath-room I was not a little surprised to find three persons lying absolutely naked on the floor and having massages. The water in the tub was too hot for me. Apart from this, I did not much like the idea of having a dip in a water used by so many people of different characters. I walked across it to the adjoining room where I had a very pleasant shower-bath. What is peculiar, those people who were having massages did not feel the least perturbed at my crossing the room. In the meantime the gentleman, who came all the way with me, left the place to attend to his own business.

So, taking advantage of his absence the authorities of the 'Hamam' wanted to squeeze from me more than what was their legitimate due. As desired by the gentleman, I paid the manager three rials for my bath, but to my surprise, he plainly refused to accept it. Generally, the charge was only two rials for a bath, but in my case they charged as much as eight rials. However, I had no other alternative but to accede to their demand, simply because I could not argue with them due to my utter ignorance of their tongue.

After my lunch came a young Iranian, once a student of the St. Xavier's College of Calcutta, to call on me in my hotel. With him, after a little talk, of course, I left to visit the mausoleums of Sadi and Hafiz, the two immortal poets of Persia. The mausoleums stand in the vicinity of the city where we soon reached. A vast congregation of foreign and native visitors, or should I say—pilgrims, had gathered there to pay their silent homage to the sacred memory of the two poets—mightier probably than any of the great emperors of Persia—poets who by their inimitable contributions have raised their country in the estimation of the people of the world. I am a mere traveller and not much of a poet. But standing here I was really lost in a trance : I asked myself, Isn't pen mightier than sword ? Who lives to-day—Timur or Hafiz ? While bowing in devotion to the sacred memory of the two great Persians, the face of my

**Mausoleums
of
Sadi and
Hafiz**

friend, I noticed, glowed with pride, and he was proud, and rightly enough, of his birth in Shiraz—the city of poets.

In the evening while taking a stroll along a principal road I was suddenly stopped by an aged man in dirty clothes. It did not take me long to know him to be an Indian before he came forward to introduce himself. He was one of the many wretched Indians who eke out, at home and abroad, a miserable existence. He was carrying with him a cobbler's bag. He wanted to put a shine on my shoes. I readily agreed, and he sat on the pavement to do his work. While polishing my shoes, he began to relate to me his tale of woe—how he was forced to take to the profession of a cobbler. He was a Mohammedan hailing from the United Provinces of India. He left

**An woeful
tale**

India for Persia during the Great War and had been there since. Here he had married a native girl by whom he had some three or four children. He secured a job in the British Consulate and had been in the service for a pretty long time. But unfortunately he soon incurred the displeasure of the Pro-Consul, resulting in his dismissal. Having lost his job, he was puzzled to solve his problem of bread in a country where he had none to back him. With tears in eyes he said, "this profession which I have adopted, is little paying ; it hardly brings in money enough for the maintenance of my family, as the people here wear generally canvas-shoes which require no polish ; and to make the cup of my

distress full, most of those, who use leather-shoes, do not again like to engage the service of a non-Iranian. They won't pay even a single cent to a foreigner. You see, since yesterday my entire family is going without meals. My kiddies, who won't understand anything but the pinch of hunger, only go on crying whenever they see me, and this I can hardly stand." In the meantime the polishing was over and I could not stay there even a minute longer to hear so pathetic a story of a fellow country-man of mine in a foreign land. I paid him a note of five *tomans* and soon left the place just to hide my tears. To undergo starvation is probably not so difficult as it is to see hungry faces.

Early next morning I found a dozen young Iranians waiting eagerly for me in the visitors' room of my hotel. They came to see me off. Candidly speaking, I was simply overwhelmed by the love and affection of these foreigners. These people left their beds in the twilight of the morning just to see off a person whom they had known for only a day and whose companionship also they could enjoy but little for their ignorance of English. As soon as I entered the room my friends stood up and I shook hands warmly with them all.

After breakfast I bade them good-bye and rode on my byke to leave for Isfahan carrying with me their good wishes and many a happy reminiscence of this city of poets. The people were still in their beds, and so the streets looked quite deserted ; only a number of

street dogs were found loitering here and there ; some of them gave a chase after me barking in their loudest. I am so afraid of dogs that my courage often fails, so much so, that even sticks, if any, slip from my grip, when chased by a barking dog. To many, I know, this will appear rather strange, and that is quite natural. How is it that a man, who has faced and has got to face so many difficulties and dangers, should be trembling before a dog !

The sun had not yet appeared on the horizon. The weather was fine as usual. In fact, this part of the country hardly experiences any threatening weather, and so the sky remains ever blue. A cold breeze was blowing against me, and I was shivering from cold, although I had enough warm clothes on. Despite it I pushed on along the high way which was neither asphalted nor properly paved. The stones on it were not pressed down. Moreover, it was full of small waves, and for these reasons I was experiencing tremendous jerkings on my

Towards byke. For many miles I could not sight
Isfahan any trace of locality. As far as my eyes could trace, no shadow of a tree was visible. At long distances I came across some mud-houses and beside them a few shops on the road. At long intervals motor-buses with passengers were found plying between Shiraz and Isfahan, a distance of more than two hundred miles. There is no town in between these two cities except a few small villages. In one of such villages I halted in an inn after the day's journey. Though

desirous of a bath I could not have any for want of water. There was no school to be found here, and so the people were almost illiterate. I had three halts in three different villages to cover the distance between Shiraz and Isfahan. All these days I had to remain, so to speak, tongue-tied, as the villagers and the bus-passengers whom I happened to meet at the halting places were as innocent of English as I was of Persian and French. I had, therefore, to make myself understood by gestures only. In these villages the people, young and old, gathered round me, and I could read it in their faces that many of them were inquisitive to talk with me. The children ran away at the sight of me while to the naughty boys I was an object of their jokings. I was also a subject of discussion in the aged circle while to the women folk I caused a wonder. But I could not help being struck by the smartness of these village-women, whose gleaming eyes I still remember. And what is wondering still is that their chastity was not questioned for their talks with me. These women, although living in villages, far, far away from any town, have also adopted the European costume, and I found none in their old national dress in any of the villages I passed through.

My life for all these three days, spent in the villages, was rather dull and monotonous. However, on the fourth day of my journey (29th May) I reached the outskirt of Isfahan at mid-day, and I was delighted to see the green trees of the city from a distance. After an hours' halt at the Police-outpost, where my

passport was examined, I resumed my journey, and soon came across a bridge over a small river. The bed of the river was almost dry with only a knee-deep water flowing by a side. I soon entered the city and began to cycle along a principal road called the 'Shahpur Road', which, with rows of trees on both sides, presented a lovely scene. On this road I stopped

Isfahan before a small hotel in a double-storeyed building and got in to seek accommodation. There stood adjoining

to this hotel an Indian shop, from which came out instantly a young Sikh who was very glad to see me, an Indian. He was quick to take me to the manager of the hotel, and a room was engaged for three rials a day. The room, though small, was well-furnished. The floor had a carpet on, and it included among others a dressing table, a dining table and some pictures decorating the walls.

After some rest I accompanied my Indian friend, Mr. Makhan Singh, to the stream flowing hard by. It was no bigger than a canal, but deep enough. The water was so transparent that its bed was clearly visible. On either side of the stream grew up wild jungles. The people of the locality seemed so uncleanly in their habits that they turned both the banks of the stream into regular latrines. Very little space could I find here, clear of nuisance. At the bottom of the river I noticed very many bones and structures of dead animals. There was no *Pucca ghat* to be found anywhere. So, keeping my clothes on the branch of a tree

I jumped straight into the stream and had an excellent bath in its cool water. The water was indeed as refreshing as anything.

In the evening just as I came out from a big restaurant in *Chaharbag*, a gentleman, dressed in European style, approached me and wanted, without any introduction whatever, to know whether I was an Indian, and immediately followed, in quick succession, many other questions, such as, what my profession was and what brought me there. Such queries naturally appeared suspicious to me; so I asked him politely if he was somebody of the Police department. At this he was much ashamed and at once begged apology of me. He requested me sincerely not to impute any ill motive to his queries. He went on to say that he had been in India for over a decade, and also had his education there. The best part of his life he spent in India, and so he looked upon her as his second mother-country. That is why he was always anxious to talk with Indians. Now I saw his point quite well and humbly requested him to excuse me if I had at all wounded his feelings. Then we had many a friendly talk between ourselves. After some talks on my travels our discussion turned to Indian politics. Talking side by side, we began to walk slowly along the *Chaharbag*, which means "four gardens", but I could not find here anything like a garden. Of course, there were three roads running side by side, each containing on either side of it big shady trees. The two roads on opposite sides were open for traffic, while the middle one was meant for the

pedestrians. On both sides existed important buildings, schools, shops and a cinema house. It represents the best part of the city, and so every evening it is found crowded with visitors, native and foreign.

Soon we came to the cinema-house, the only one in the city. My friend wanted me to accompany him to the cinema. I agreed, and accordingly we entered the house where we met the manager to whom I was introduced by my friend. We then got into the hall along with the manager and took our seats in the first class. None of us had to pay, the manager being the personal friend of Mr. Surush, my companion. It was the summer season, but the night was cold. The cinema-hall is used only during the winter. In the summer the visitors are accommodated in the open compound of the house. Those for the lowest class have got to pay two rials only while those for the first class have to pay five rials. The lower classes, I noticed, were crowded mostly with fair faces dressed in European costume. I was rather surprised not to find any *fej cap* on the head of any Iranian. Wearing of *fej caps*, I was told later on, is strictly prohibited in Iran under threat of punishment, and that is why it was conspicuous by its absence.

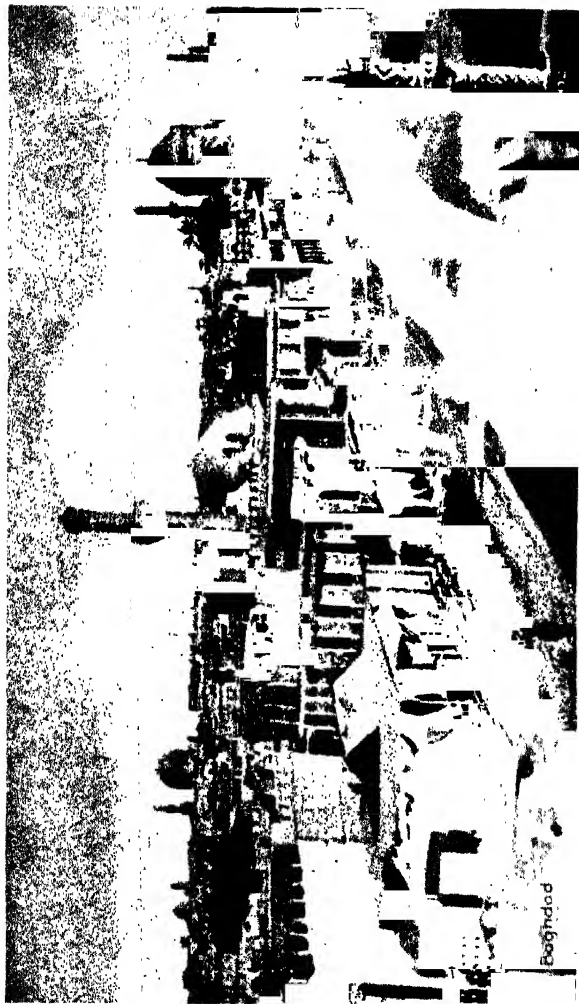
Soon the play began. It was a German picture of the last Great War. In this country most of the pictures that are imported from abroad are German, and this is because Iran is more friendly to Germany than to any other country. In the commercial sphere also Germany enjoys special privileges. The system of

Government is also much similar to that of the Nazi Land as can be seen from her laws. Young Germany serves, more or less, as the ideal of the Iranian young-men almost in every respect.

The picture showed how loyally and daringly the German soldiers carried out the orders of their captains under very adverse circumstances. The picture was not so very attractive to my friends, as there was no fair face to be found in it. The manager had no knowledge of English, and hence Mr. Surush, a teacher in the English missionary school, acted as his interpreter. It was about eleven when the play came to an end. On coming out I was shivering from cold, and hence I bade them good-night then and there, but before we parted, Mr. Surush requested me to pay a visit to his school which was the only English school in the city. I did not go far when a sudden call from behind made me stop. I found Mr. Surush running towards me accompanied by a young man. Soon he came, and after introducing the young man as a student of his school, who could speak English quite well, he told me that the boy would be very glad to show me round the interesting places of the city. I took it as God-send, because, otherwise it would be very difficult for me to visit the different historical things and understand them. It was always impossible for me, for lack of adequate funds, to avail of the services of any interpreter. So, my joy knew no bounds when the young man voluntarily placed his service at my disposal during my stay in the city.

The following morning the young man came to my hotel just after breakfast and we proceeded to visit first the "Moving Minaret", situated in a small village called Garladan, four miles away from the city. The road runs along a zigzag course through villages and at times along the bank of the narrow stream.

In many places on the road the dust was as much as a foot deep, preventing us from cycling comfortably. After about an hour's journey we reached the village, and then passed through a narrow path to a small mosque. On our entrance into it we found a dozen persons seated on a mat drinking tea. Beside them was the grave-yard of Amu Abdullah, once a great saint of the country. An interesting story is told here regarding the tomb of this saint. It is said, Amu Abdullah left instructions before his death to his servant to build over his grave a tomb with such minarets as should be moving. As desired by his master, the servant whose name nobody knows yet, built over him this tomb of two minarets. Guided by the care-taker we soon came to the roof, and then I ascended one of the minarets by the narrow stair-case. I took hold of a wooden beam and began to shake it with all my strength, and to my surprise I found the entire building with both the minarets actually moving, although the building was built of bricks. This is why it is called the "*Menareh Jonban*" or the "Moving Minaret." It was built about six hundred and forty years ago. About a decade back the building suffered some



Baghdad

damages when the minarets collapsed. These were then rebuilt by the Government. After paying some money to the care-taker we left for the city to visit "**Meidan Shah**", decidedly the most important place. It is surrounded by many big buildings of importance. On one side of this meidan stands the famous mosque called "**Masjedeh Shah**" which was built in 1612 by Shah Abbas the Great. Its lovely architecture, its paintings of high artistic merit and its precious marbles attract visitors from far and near. From here we proceeded to the other mosque called the "**Masjedeh Sheikh Lotffollah**" which was built sometime between 1603 and 1618, but it hardly looks centuries old. It also is rich in architecture and lovely paintings, still pointing to the supremacy once attained by the Persian artists in the world of art. After visiting in it the underground prayer-hall, we left for "**Ali Qapi**," the seven-storeyed palace of Shah Abbas the Great. It is a huge building, but its rooms are small and rather ill-ventilated, although some of them are decorated with paintings. Standing on the roof of this building one can have a distinct view of the entire city of Isfahan which spreads over a vast area at an altitude of about 5500 feet above the sea-level. The roads run straight, and with rows of trees on either side they present a lovely scene. This city enjoys an ideal climate with cool temperature which hardly exceeds 60° F. H. even in the summer. The population is about a hundred thousand.

Towards the evening my young friend turned up

again, and after tea we both left for a stroll. We walked on along the Shahpur road till we came to a crossing where we turned to our left and proceeded on right along the road. While going on, we came across several gardens, but none of them appealed to me. There was no flower to be found in them ; only fruit trees were there. The country abounds in fruit-gardens, and almost every home has got a small fruit-garden of its own. Fruits, particularly grapes, are so cheap in this country, especially in Isfahan, that fruits worth half an anna are enough for a man. However, we walked on and on without stopping anywhere. Strangely enough, I found no bench to sit on in any of the gardens we came across.

Soon we passed by a big cloth-mill. The people took pride in it, because they had not seen any factory before. The present king is a great patron of industry, and under his reign a new industrial era has begun in Iran. Some factories, about a score, have sprung up all over the country. The present Government wants its people to be self-supporting, and with this end in view the business of the country has been monopolised by the state, the importation of foreign goods by private parties being strictly restricted. In the matter of industrialising the country His Majesty has been partly successful too. Indeed, it will take the Government a good long time yet to carry out their plan, firstly because the government do not control adequate funds for the purpose, and secondly because the people depend for almost every bit of their

necessaries upon other countries. Another difficulty is that the government do not at all favour the idea of incurring debt, even if it be for the uplift of the nation. Nevertheless, it hardly escapes the notice of a visitor that the country is fast progressing in all spheres. An eloquent testimony of this is found in the new roads constructed through mountaineous deserts, and in the new towns and cities that have sprung up all over the county. And these innovations so prominently capture the eyes of a foreign visitor that he cannot but be led to believe, when he takes a comparative view of things, old and new, that probably there existed previously no arrangement for communication between different parts of the country, and that the towns and cities suffered lamentably from lack of sanitary arrangements. The people at present can travel to any part of the country by motor-buses which ply regularly. The construction of railways cannot, however, be ignored ; rather it is a crying necessity for easy communication ; but that the railways have not yet come into being in Iran is, I think, largely due to the geographical position of the country. Only recently, a new railway has, however, been constructed between the Black Sea and Teheran, the capital of the country. At present there is a railway under construction between the capital and the Persian Gulf which, when completed, will, I think, greatly facilitate the journey of visitors and also the transportation of goods to and from Teheran.

It was dusk when we reached the famous **Khaju**

bridge lying over the dry river in the outskirts of the city. It was constructed in the seventeenth century by Shah Abbas II, but the age has not told much upon it. It is a double-storeyed bridge with footpaths and a motor road. This structure of stones speaks of the engineering skill of the ancient Persians. Every evening, especially the Sunday evenings draw here a huge crowd of visitors. This is probably because in Iran there is no other bridge of its status, though many such are found in India and abroad. Many school students and some visitors, both native and foreign, I noticed, were enjoying the cold but sweet evening of the summer on the dry sandy bed of the

Khaju Bridge river. Some picnic parties also came to my notice. A few tea-stalls at the foot of the bridge and on the river bed catered to the comforts of the visitors that gathered to enjoy the evening. We also got in one of the tea-stalls, and there we took our seats on a big carpet to have our evening tea. A carpet is rather a thing of luxury in other countries, but in Iran it is not. Almost in every house and shop one finds a carpet. The people take some fancy to it. Finding me, a foreigner, in their midst, some people looked aghast. They seemed very inquisitive about me. Many of them were listening very patiently to our talks. Some time after, a few of them plucked up courage and attacked me from right and left with a volley of questions, some in French and some in Persian. I had to remain contented, simply by impressing it upon them some-

how or other that I could follow neither of their languages.

Next morning I was out, as promised, to pay a visit to the English Missionary school. At the gate I was warmly received by the teaching staff and then conducted to the teachers' room, where an interesting discussion on the subject "Part to be played by the students for the uplift of a nation" was going on. As soon as I entered, the discussion, however, came to a close. I was then introduced to a number of students who had been there. Of them I remember particularly one, a young lovely chap, full of life, who was introduced to me by Mr. Surush as the grandson of the former King of Persia. I was a little surprised, for it was difficult for me to know him from his dress to be a scion of the Royal family. I put my hand on his shoulders, and asked him in affectionate terms a question or two, but he was too shy to speak,—so shy that he could not even raise his head. But a sweet smile was playing on his lips all the while.

It is a big school with about a thousand students on its roll. The students are provided with lodging and boarding houses with a big playground in the school compound. The system of education pursued in this school is not much different from that of ours in India. I was shown round all the departments of the school, and that over, I left for the office of the Governor of Isfahan to seek an interview with His Excellency.

The country, though very extensive, has a popula-

tion of only about fifteen millions. Since the very beginning of the century no census of the population of the country has been taken, but at present the Government are trying to take a census by issuing an identification card to every individual. They estimate that there are about five million people inhabiting the borderland who have not yet come under identification. The country is divided into thirty-two provinces, seven big and the rest small, and this is for administrative purposes. The density of population of Iran is only nine in one kilo-meter.

Soon I reached the Governor's office. Rich in architecture it was probably the best building in the city. I sent my visiting card to the Governor, and His Excellency was kind enough to promptly grant me an interview. I was warmly received by him at his chamber. A strongly built man with a lovely stalwart figure, he looked indeed a statesman. He is said to be one of the few who actively helped His Excellency Reza Shah Pahlavi in his timely uprising against the throne. I found him a

With the perfect gentleman—very very frank
Governor and simple. I have rarely come across
so unostentatious a man in such an
exalted position. I had an hour's talk with him regarding the social and economic conditions of the country. What pleased me most was his firm determination to eradicate all social evils. He was confident that an amicable settlement of all grave political problems confronting their country was not far off.

He was also hoping for a non-aggression pact amongst all the Nations of the Near East which, happily enough, has meanwhile been achieved. This will, I think, go a long way towards helping them to reorganise their country socially, economically and politically at a greater speed. After such a pleasant discussion for a pretty long time when I stood up to bid him good-bye, I was simply overwhelmed with the unusual cordiality with which he wished me good luck. On reaching my lodge I became rather surprised when I found in my book entitled "My Travels in the East" a few currency notes while turning listlessly over the pages of the book. Surely, these must have been kept there by His Excellency, while glancing over its pages. This is something more than commonest courtesy, and I will carry it long in my memory.

In the afternoon I had been to an Armenian village lying in the vicinity of the city. It is a flourishing village inhabited purely by the Armenians. There is a high school and a church here. It might be regarded as an ideal village. The roads are clean, and the housing system better. Nearly

An Armenian cent per cent of the population is
Village literate. These Armenians are admittedly the richest people in Iran.

They are more advanced than the Iranians in almost every sphere. It is said, Shah Abbas the Great brought them here as captives after his conquest of Armenia with a view to utilise their services in the better reorganisation of the country. They were able arti-

sans. They were granted lands to settle and to adopt Persia as their motherland. They are now as good citizens of Persia as the Iranians.

It was dusk when after three days' pleasant stay in this lovely city I left for Teheran. In this country most of the people prefer travelling at night when it is cooler. No one has to be afraid of bandits. Banditry now is a thing of the past in this land. At every important point on the roads are found armed sentries guarding the peace of the locality all the night over. The tea-stalls and hotels also are kept open for the whole night to cater to the comforts of

Koom the travellers. The road to Teheran runs across a vast plain. There come also a few small hills on the way. The poor condition of the road did not allow me to cycle comfortably. However, after the night's journey I halted at day-break at a small way-side village for the day. After three nights' journey across the small deserts, of course, with occasional halts in way-side inns, I reached Koom in the early hours of the morning of the 2nd June.

It is a very small town famous for its **Masume Koom**, a mosque of golden towers. Its fine architecture attracts visitors even from abroad. Unfortunately, I could not have a glimpse of the rich decorations inside the mosque, myself being a non-Mohammedan. No non-Mohammedan is ever allowed access into its precinct. This town is regarded as one of the holy places by the Moslems.

After a day's stay in the town, I left it early next morning for the capital. As I began to advance towards Teheran, my eagerness to reach the city became more and more strong. I heard a good deal of the capital from numerous friends while travelling in the country. To many of them it was as charming as Paris. But the road leading to this 'Paris of the East' could not, I must confess, impress me at all. It was in no sense better than others. At long intervals I came across small villages, and beside many of them I found flocks of healthy sheep and goats pasturing in the barren fields. These sheep and goats reminded me of their kindred in India who probably are not half so healthy-looking. These animals, however, provide the only source of income to the desert-people.

Next morning—it was the 4th of June—I found myself cycling up and down a hill beside a lovely lake in the desert. Then came in view the snow-capped mountain standing on the back of the capital. My mind throbbed at once with joy when I gazed at the glittering snow-capped peak. I felt a fresh energy pulsating through my exhausted self, and I began to push on and on with renewed strength towards the capital which was now not very far off.

At mid-day I reached the city of Teheran. My first impression of the city on my arrival was one of disappointment. I was rather surprised not to find in this much-trumpeted "Paris of the East" any decent building on any of the roads I passed through. Most of the streets and lanes were not asphalted ; moreover

they were as dirty as anything. The motor-cars were running in their courses raising behind them a dust-storm much to the inconveniences of the passers-by. Still it was the "Paris of the East" ! I was going round the lanes and streets looking for a hotel, but I could not find any, because the signboards on shops and hotels were all written in Persian.

Teheran The Government have proscribed the use of Roman characters under threat of punishment. Now I remembered, "patience and perseverance overcome mountains." I began to enquire of the passers-by for a hotel, but none cared to reply. Probably they were ignorant of English. At long last I was fortunate enough to find a young man, an employee in a bank, who kindly extended his helping hand to me. He took me to the "Teheran Hotel", located on the Chiragh Burque Avenue. This was indeed a decent hotel. I was accommodated here in a room which had three beds, the charge for each being three rials a day.

The ground-floor of the hotel had in it a big restaurant. Every evening a musical concert was played in it till very late hours of the night. I used to enjoy this music from my bed in my leisure hours, but it was rather a disturbance to me while at work. My room-mate was a young energetic military student of Majanderan, a watery province of Iran. This province with its rivers, forests and most fertile lands resembles our Bengal in many respects. Like the Bengalees its people also are very fond of fish and rice. This

gentleman came to enjoy his holidays in the capital. He was a jolly chap, ever eager to talk with me, but the language-difficulty stood in our way. Still we often exchanged our ideas by gestures. I would find him always in his military uniform like other young men of the country. It is because all Iranians, aged between nineteen and twenty-one, are at present under military conscription. The graduates of the High schools (Colleges) have to undergo a military training for one year, and those of the Secondary schools for one year and a half, while the rest undergo the training for a period of two years. During the training period the students are provided with free boarding and lodging ; over and above they receive for their pocket expenses a small sum of only five rials. Besides, they are provided with kit by the state. So, with its young men dressed in military uniform the entire nation seems to be marching ahead under a military commander to meet an imminent danger.

In the room adjoining to mine, there lived a young couple who had come to the capital on business. The gentleman had been in India for a long time, when he learnt both Hindusthani and English. I used to spend much of my spare time in their company. His wife never read English ; so she could not speak with me, but still she was no less eager to talk. She often asked me questions in her own language, but unable to make out what she meant, I confined my answers to a brief 'yes' or 'no' which naturally caused a laughter in the room.

Next evening while I was walking in the park opposite the huge edifice of the Central Police-Station, I was happy to meet a countryman of mine, a young Indian Mohammedan. He was a graduate of the Osmania University of Hyderabad, who had been on a pilgrimage to Mecca. On his way back to India he was visiting the important holy places of Iran. We took our seats on a bench beside the tea-stall in the garden, and then engaged ourselves in a discussion on social conditions. I found him a staunch supporter of *Purdah*. Abolition of *Purdah*, he thought, has lowered the standard of morality of the Iranian women. I could not, of course, subscribe to his views as I am never a supporter of the *Purdah*. But during my stay there I came in touch with many other people who also, I found, more or less shared his views. I do not know what after all was the basis of their study, maybe they came in touch with female characters of not a very high moral standard, and from them they probably wanted to judge the moral standard of the whole society. They then noticed only the dark side of the country just as Miss Mayo did in the case of India. I venture to say from my contact with simple village women and also with the educated ladies of the country that the moral standard in Iran is in no way inferior to any I know of. The conservative section of the society, who delight to see their women-folk confined within the four walls of their houses, can not possibly tolerate the freedom of their women.

However, meanwhile a good long time had rolled by. So, I stood up to leave for my hotel. My friend Mr. Kirmani began to press me to pass the night with him in his host's house, lying in a village some three miles away from the city. I could not appreciate the reasonableness of his request ; so I simply asked my friend how could it be possible for me to accompany him to his host's house where I would be a stranger ? Still he insisted on. At long last I yielded to his request just to see how an uninvited stranger is received in an Iranian house at such a late hour of the night. I decided to accompany him. When we reached the outskirt of the city, there was impenetrable darkness all around. There was no municipal light

In a village to be found to guide us, and moreover
home there was no regular road leading to the village. So, very very cautiously we walked on along narrow paths across the cultivated fields. More often than not we began to stumble down. Thus we proceeded on till we came before some water which was flowing down the fields. The water was not deep. Across it we walked on, and soon reached a small village. While passing through this village we found a gathering of about a dozen persons amusing with a girl before a house. Taking no notice of it we went on, and before long reached the house of my friend's host. It was then about eleven. The generous host of my friend had, in the meantime, got very anxious not to find his guest back till that late hour of the night. He feared, Mr. Kirmani must have lost his

way. And while he was discussing with a friend of his if it would not be wise to send a man to find him out, we reached the place. Surely he was surprised to see me, a stranger, with Mr. Kirmani, but his joy knew no bounds when I was introduced to him. He embraced and kissed me in an ecstasy of joy. He then took me in to his house saying, "Here is your home, please come in." While entering the drawing-room of his house he remarked, "you know this house is ever open to an Indian." Then turning to Mr. Kirmani he said, "you have rendered me a great service to-night for which I cannot sufficiently thank you." I was, so to speak, captivated by his warmest reception, and for a few minutes I could utter not a single word of thanks for his most affectionate behaviour. Of course, from the very beginning I began to feel quite at home.

Now, the first question our generous host Mr. M. S. Madany asked me, after we had taken our seats, was about our famous Mr. M. N. Roy. Mr. Roy, I was given to learn, once spent nearly a couple of months with him in his house. Mr. Madany is, indeed, a great friend of the Indians. He won't let an Indian—I mean an Indian of some culture, of course,—if he happens to meet him, go away without entertaining him in his far off village home. Mr. Madany had his education in U. S. A. Although a great scholar, he has none of the pretensions of a learned man. He associates with people like children. Tired as I was, I felt like sleepy, and could not know when, in the course of talks, I fell asleep on the easy chair. After

sometime I awoke at the sudden touch of my revered host and found our meals ready on the carpeted floor. Our dishes consisted of some wheat-bread, vegetable curries, polao, curds and fruits. Mr. Madany and his friend shared food from the same plate while myself and Mr. Kirmani were served in two different plates. Of course, we all had to take to our respective plates, whenever we required more, from the common plate of food. Here also, I found my friends drinking water from the same glass. Now, this is something of which I feel rather sick, but I could neither express it here nor could I make a convert of myself to the habit. I had, therefore, to go without water. Thank God, none of us had the habit of drinking wine, but unfortunately Mr. Madany's friend had got it. He did not feel any scruple whatever to drink wine before us. Many Iranian Mohammedans, too, have, of late, got addicted to wine although Islamism gives no sanction to it, and what is all the more curious is that nobody even cares to bother about it. The outlook of the society has so changed that the addicts are no longer looked down upon.

Early next morning I awoke at the noise caused by the conversations that were going on beside my bed amongst those friends of mine. My friends were early risers, but not so myself. The breakfast was ready ; it was only for myself that they could not help themselves ; so without loss of time I washed my face to share with them my breakfast. Just in front of the house lay a beautiful garden where a carpet was spread, and

on this carpet was served our breakfast. Tea prepared with milk, some bread, cheese and a number of apples—these were all we had in our breakfast. After breakfast we all left for the city. This village, where I passed the night, is called **Madanyabad** after the name of our friend Mr. Madany who is the founder of it. The village came into existence only a few years back.

Mr. Madany and his friends, I discovered in this short time, were the staunchest supporters of the *Purdah*. They would like women to wear veils. And so, all the female members of his family were, I noticed, kept behind the *Purdah*. Since the abolition of veil system by legislation in the month of January, 1936, the ladies, who prefer the *Purdah*, do not dare to come out of their seclusion with veils on lest their veils be torn off and lest they be insulted by the Police who won't tolerate even a handkerchief either on the head or on the shoulder of any woman. Of course, the number of people in favour of veils is rather negligible in the country, and these negligible few, again, have but little voice in the society.

On our way to the city we stopped for a while in the house of Mr. Madany's eldest son who lived separately. It was only a few yards off from Mr. Madany's house. At the door we were received very cordially by his son. He hastened to spread a carpet in his fruit garden where we took our seats. In this villages also as in many others the houses lay scattered, each having a wall around it.

Mr. Madany had two beautiful grand-daughters, rather kiddies, with whom we joked for a long while. We were treated to tea after which we left for the city. Mr. Madany has got some four or five sons, the eldest being married lives separately. One thing that impressed me most was the filial love and regard of his sons. Without his permission they would not budge even an inch. Mr. Madany has some landed property which fetches him a decent income ; over and above, he draws a monthly pension from the Government.

Now we were passing along paths running sometimes through localities and sometimes across green fields. While I was enjoying the scenery around and was not in a mood to turn my attention to anything else, my old friend brought in again that vexed question of *Purdah*. An exponent of the veil system, he was ever enthusiastic to bring home to me the bright side of it. I was, therefore, enjoying it very much when in his enthusiasm he was even consulting the village women,

**Women
&
the Purdah**

we happened to meet on the way, regarding their opinion on the abolition of veil system. Of course, I was also no less curious to hear from them their views. Mr. Madany became mad with joy when those village women passed their verdict in his favour. But I have yet doubt if those illiterate women were at all sincere in their verdict. Had they been so, how could it be possible for them to move about so freely without a veil on ? The conservative outlook of my friend

rather pained me, but I remember, I was greatly delighted when I first learnt that the proclamation of His Majesty abolishing the veil system was greeted with joy by most of the people and especially by the womenfolk who had been for centuries past a victim of this social injustice. That the women of the country were really wishing for such a change is abundantly proved by the fact that they took no time to cast off their veils and adapt themselves to the changed environments. They now look as natural as ever, and I think, it will not be a hyperbole if I say that they are probably the smartest women to-day in the East. They have disproved that women are born only to be house-wives and that they are ill-fitted to take part in public life. As a matter of fact, they are taking their legitimate share in every sphere of work. This awakening amongst the women can't but evoke the admiration of a foreign visitor. The child marriage, which prevailed so long, no more takes place in the country. The Child Marriage Bill was enacted about five years ago, by which the marriage of a boy before he is eighteen, and of a girl before she is sixteen, is prohibited. While many a disability applying to women has been removed, it is a pity that they are deprived yet of their political rights and privileges. Women-franchise remains still unrecognised. There is only one women organisation in the country, but this organisation also does not seek to bring political consciousness amongst the women. They are more interested in social matters.

The people of Iran seem to be less superstitious and more liberal in their social outlook. They do not seem to have much attachment for their old customs and traditions. And this, I think, is the secret of the success that the Government have been able to attain in introducing into the society within so short a period such reforms as the abolition of Purdah-system, the enactment of the Child Marriage bill, the introduction of European costume etc. It is said that the Government received no protest whatever against the introduction of those reforms. It is, indeed, a matter of great wonder that even the Mollahs did not dare enter any protest against the Government when the latter deprived them of their long-enjoyed rights and privileges and when most of the mosques were turned into so many educational institutions. This shows that the Mollahs commanded practically no influence over the people.

However, while proceeding across the fields towards the city, we met a shepherd boy who was tending a flock of sheep and goats. Mr. Madany asked him, simply for the sake of joke of course, if he would be at all willing to present a goat to me, a foreign guest of their country. At once a sweet smile bedecked the face of the boy and he came forward to present me then and there with one of his choicest goats. At this I was simply overwhelmed. The Iranians enjoy, and I think deservedly, a great reputation for their sense of

hospitality. Whereever one goes, he is treated to light refreshments. To speak from my personal experience, I had many an occasion to be treated likewise ; nay, I was even compelled many a time to pass nights in the company of such Iranians with whom I picked up acquaintance just on the way.

After lunch while I was enjoying a little rest in my hotel, a gentleman called on me. After a word or two by way of introduction he asked me if I would be at all willing to see his younger sister waiting outside. I readily agreed, and went to meet her at the door of my hotel. This young girl, Miss Tahira Deemyad, is a graduate of the University of Lucknow. Her father Mr. Syed Ahmed Ali Deemyad M. A., B. L., F. T. S., F. O. R. S., M. G. I. (Lond.), had his education in Bengal, and he was for sometime a professor in the Calcutta University. Later on he joined the Lucknow University where he served as a professor of English literature until 1936, when he retired from service to settle in Iran, his homeland.

After some talks Miss Deemyad wanted me to favour her with my autograph which I did with pleasure. Although a girl of eighteen, I found her of an exceptionally intelligent stuff, far advanced in ideas. As I talked with her, her broad outlook, her smartness, above all her charming manners began to impress me more and more. She seemed to take much interest in politics, and so do I. I talked with her on a good many subjects, especially on politics. In course of our discussion I asked her if it would not be a

wise thing to form an association, of course, cultural, aiming at the promotion of good-will and fellow-feeling between the two sister nations. I suggested that the association might be called **Irano-Indian Cultural Association**. This idea of forming an association came into my head when, after coming in touch with the educated people of the country, I found that they knew practically nothing about India as she is to-day. The Iranians maintain a very low impression of the Indians in general, and **Irano-Indian Cultural Association** it is probably because they form their impressions from a section of uncultured Indians with whom they happen to come in contact in their country.

Likewise, many of the Indians, I know, little know of the great achievements of modern Iran in different spheres. Hence it was that I dreamt of an association which could help to bring the two peoples closer together. And this object could be achieved, I thought, by the publication of a monthly magazine in two languages, Persian and English, treating of current social, economic and political conditions of Iran and India.

My young friend, Miss Deemyad, heartily welcomed this proposal as she also, as I was told, had been thinking of such an association. So, after prolonged discussion on the subject, we decided to take the initiative in the matter. We, therefore, typed then and there a letter to the Minister of Education asking for a permit to convene a meeting of the prominent citizens

of Teheran for the purpose. But before posting the letter we thought it wise to secure signatures of some prominent people of Iran to the letter. So, I accompanied Miss Deemyad to her house where I was introduced to her father, Mr. Deemyad. He received me very cordially. His mind probably at once went back to India and especially to Bengal wherefrom I hailed and where Mr. Deemyad passed all his boyhood and youth, and whose soil and water nourished him. He could speak some Bengali ; so it gave me immense pleasure to talk with him in my own tongue. He began to inquire of me about many of his friends and especially of Mr. Panna Lal Bose, the Judge of the famous Bhawal Sannyasi case of Dacca. Mr. Bose was a classmate and once an intimate friend of his. His affectionate behaviour simply overwhelmed me, and within this short space of time we became quite chummy. Now, he felt greatly delighted when I spoke to him about the association, and he readily put his signature to the letter. Then, myself, accompanied by Miss Deemyad, proceeded to the boarding house of the women students of the colleges. Here I was introduced to the lady Superintendent who had her education in Paris. This lady also highly welcomed the idea and assured us of her every support. In this boarding house I was happy to meet one Miss Shiraj Un-nisa Begum, the only Indian girl student in Persia. She was deputed by the Osmania University of Hyderabad to prosecute a higher course of studies in Persian. As there was no

other Indian student in Teheran and as it was difficult for her to associate with other Indians, mostly businessmen, she was naturally glad to see me. She was a sweet amiable girl and attracted from all their spontaneous admiration. Although in a land where all have taken to European costume, she felt proud to be in her own Indian costume, e.g. *Sari*. Indeed, she might be regarded as an ambassador of Indian culture in Persia. Her sisterly feelings towards me, together with her broad outlook on many social matters, attracted me highly, but probably she was a bit timid. From this place, after taking tea with them, we soon left for the house of Mr. Hezazi, an influential citizen and a very prominent advocate of the city. He lived in a house in the same lane beside the boarding house. Mr. Hezazi is very social. Almost every evening I used to find under his roof a gathering of highly cultured people—poets, professors, students and priests discussing various subjects. It is in this place that I had the privilege and pleasure of meeting some very popular men of the city.

On our entrance into the drawing-room of Mr. Hezazi all those present stood up and warmly shook hands with us. To our great joy, we found here among others our Mr. Madany who at once introduced us to them. Mr. Hezazi was quite innocent of English, and so Mr. Madany played the part of an interpreter when I placed before them our proposal, and explained to them the aims and objects of the association. They appreciated the utility of such an association, and with pleasure they all put their

signatures to the letter. In this connection I also called on some great men of Iran like Mr. Thadayon, the ex-president of the Parliament, the ex-minister of Education, and the founder of the "Madrassa Thadayon", Dr. Sadig, the founder principal of the Danesh Sarai Ali (Teachers' Training College), and Dr. Jordan, Principal of the Elburz college since the day of its inception, whose student the then Education Minister of the Government was. Every one of them gave their whole-hearted support to the proposal. Thus my joy knew no bounds when I found that my proposal had enlisted support practically from every quarter. But

my high hopes were all shattered
With the when I met the Minister of Education
Education and had a cold reception from him
Minister although I was introduced to him by
no other than Mr. Thadayon. The

Minister maintained throughout an attitude of indifference and did not seem happy enough while going through the letter signed by so many prominent citizens. It is yet a mystery to me why he was so indifferent in the matter of giving us the necessary permit although we wanted him to be its President. However, his indifferent attitude amounted to a refusal to permit us to form the association. This naturally disappointed every one of my friends, but to speak for myself I was rather benefited, because this brought me in closer contact with some prominent people of the country. It also taught me many new things to

learn and remember about some novel characters. One day, being invited I called on a professor of a college, but I felt rather amused when on arriving I was told at his door that he had gone out. I called on him once again, and this time also on his invitation, but it was funny, indeed, that the maid came out to tell me that my host was not in, while I saw with my own eyes through the window that he was playing merrily with his dog. However strange it may appear, I had it from many friends of mine that this sort of ideal courtesy became rather a fashion with many a so-called cultured Iranian.

In almost every country the people enjoy to a great extent the civil liberty, but in Iran the liberty of the people is greatly encroached upon by the state, so much so, that one cannot form any kind of association, not even a sporting club,

Civil liberty or a social organisation. Even the news published in Dailies cannot rush into print without undergoing a censoring at the hands of the Police. Even the lectures delivered by the college-professors to their students, I was told, have to be submitted to the police before they are delivered. In a sense the people of the country are deprived under the Pahlavi regime of their social and political freedom.

All the same, His Majesty Reza Shah Pahlavi is undoubtedly the maker of Modern Iran. But for him Iran could not be what she is to day. It is Reza Shah—no one can deny—who saved his country when

it was almost involved in the peril of being divided between the Russians and the English during the war, and without the rise of Reza Shah in the political horizon from an ordinary soldier in a Russian army, this country would probably have lost its very entity as a nation. Again, it is the Shah who is primarily responsible for bringing about a radical change in the outlook of the country in every respect—socially, economically and politically. Socially,

Reza Shah the society of the country has been,
& so to speak, thoroughly reformed. It
Modern Iran has been purged of many evils, such as,
 the Child marriage, Purdah system etc.

The women have been allowed their proper place in the society. Economically, the people are at present much better off than before. Their purchasing capacity has appreciably increased. Laws have been made to safeguard the interests of the country against foreign exploitation. But most remarkable to-day is the progress of education in the country as is evident from the following statistics :

1922

Educational Institutions	Students	Female Students	Government Expenditure
612	55131	9016	6636300 Rials

1935

Educational Institutions	Students	Female Students	Government Expenditure
5339	255673	62079	58004070 Rials*

Politically, the country is getting sufficiently equipped to meet any enemy. The military education has been conscribed for every young man. The army has been mechanised and a strong air force has been built up. The government is ever alert to the international situation.

H. M. Shah wields an unbounded influence over the people. He is indeed the strong dictator of Iran, whose word is law of the land. Of course, there is a Parliament consisting of elected members, but its power is very, very restricted. It is practically no better than an advisory body. While quite sensible of the general progress under H. M. Shah, many of the educated people honestly resent the action of the Government restricting the civil rights of the people. But no one dare criticise the Government for their action ; if anyone does, he is beheaded then and there. I remember, one evening while talking with a prominent citizen on the political condition of Iran, he whispered into my ears : "The power is centralised in one hand. The ministers are no better than the courtiers of the

* It should be noted that the total income of the Government in the year was only 750827790 Rials.

ancient time. They are mere puppets in the hands of Shah." He also apprehended that this sort of suppression and repression might, after the death of Shah, lead to a great social and political revolution. He said: "The crown prince may not be able to command the same influence as his father does to-day over the officials and the people." His fear, I gathered, is, more or less, shared by many others. If such a revolution takes place at all, its effect remains to be seen. It is not unlikely, it will retard the progress of the country to an extent impossible to be described.

Teheran is admittedly the biggest city of Iran with a population of more than three hundred thousand. It is described by the people as the 'Paris of the East.' I do not know why it is so described; maybe it is because the people do not find elsewhere such asphalted roads, so many cinema-halls, such two or three-storeyed houses, so many hotels and dancing-cabarets.

The city of Teheran

The roads of the city run straight. On either side of almost every street stand rows of trees like those seen on the streets of Paris. Of the streets some are asphalted and some are not. Years ago, there were trams drawn by horses, but at present there is no tramway line to be found anywhere in the city. Passenger buses which ply all over the city have taken its place. There are also *Duruskas*, a sort of hackney carriages, drawn by one horse, but it is an expensive conveyance. In this city also as in others, the people have to draw their drinking water from

the under-ground drains. The system of watering the streets also is no better. Teheran wants in parks and gardens. The buildings are not of the modern style ; most of them are small and one-storeyed. But the city can boast of high class hotels, restaurants, dancing-halls and cinema-houses, many of which stand on Lalezar, the most beautiful street of the city. The city stands on a plain just facing the Elburz Mountain, at the foot of which lies Shimraon, the best summer resort, at a distance of only six miles from Teheran. The cold but invigorating climate of the place draws here a huge crowd of rich people. The lovely waterfall beside the town and the snow-capped mountain are other charms to the visitors of the resort.

One afternoon while walking along a principal road, rather in a pensive mood, my attention was suddenly disturbed by a hue and cry raised by some school-children who were running to and fro. On approaching nearer I found that drinking water was rolling down on the street from the tank on the standing car, and the irritated driver was running with a cane after those wicked boys. It was, indeed, a funny sight to see. The boys on their way back from the school took it into their head to loosen the tap of the water-tank to see how water rolled down on the street, and how the passers-by enjoyed it ! With a view to this, they formed themselves into several groups, and while one group was being chased by the angry driver, another took its place to loosen the tap,

and the more the driver showed temper, the more did the boys laugh and enjoy ! This continued till the traffic-police came to the rescue of the embarrassed driver when these mischief-makers ran away to different directions. While my sympathy goes to the driver, I cannot help recalling the days of our school-life when we too felt proud if we could put a man to rage and thus make a laughing stock of him.

However, I now turned to my own business. I had not gone very far from this place when I met my old friend Mr. Madany whose face looked pale and sweating. I, therefore, enquired of him why he looked so worried. To this he replied, "You know, I live in a village. Our drinking water is supplied by a Municipal vendor who did not supply it yesterday, and hence my son enquired of him why he did not supply the water. This the vendor resented, resulting in a quarrel between the two, and the consequence was that my son had returned beaten. And what is funny still is that the matter has been wrongly reported by the vendor to the city fathers who, out of malice prepense, has asked him to stop supply of water altogether to my village. So we are suffering miserably from scarcity of water. I have now come to the city to consult some lawyers." So saying he almost immediately left the place.

In the same evening I happened to meet some educated girls who talked with me on diverse subjects. While discussing with them on the subject of general education, I desired to know

from them if they favoured higher education for girls. They remarked in reply : "Generally speaking, we do not much favour higher education for girls. Because most of the girls do not study seriously, and hence to many of them, in their married

Women on life, the higher education comes practically to no use. Of course, we very
Female-
education. strongly feel that something is wanting in the present system of female education and that it requires an overhauling." Frankly speaking, I was highly impressed by their broad outlook on many social matters. They are inspired in every matter by the lofty ideal of making their nation well worth the name.

It was after breakfast one morning that I left for the office of the Government Foreign Exchange Bureau to exchange some Iranian money for the Iraqi. In Iran a special permit is required from this Bureau to buy foreign money. After walking for sometime I lost my way ; so I approached a gentleman who was talking with a girl just on the foot-path, and requested him to tell me the direction to the said office. It was the girl, and not the gentleman, who promptly came forward with a reply. She was not satisfied by merely giving me the direction ; she actually accompanied me. Probably she had a doubt if I would be able to follow her directions. She was, I came to learn from her, a student of the American college, now called the Elburz college. The gentleman, with whom she was speaking, was her tutor. I was filled with admiration

to see such smartness in her, a girl of only sixteen. Who knows how such girls felt, only a couple of years ago, behind the Purdah ! We soon reached the office of the Bureau. I am grateful to this my young friend, who not only guided me all the way but also acted in the Exchange office as my interpreter. The officers here were all ignorant of English. Unfortunately I could not secure a permit for which I came here. I had, therefore, no other alternative but to spend the Iranian money upon nothing, as by law I would not be allowed to carry with me while leaving the country an amount exceeding two hundred rials.

About a fortnight had rolled by and the day came to snatch me away from the midst of my friends—friends whose love and affection for me knew no bounds. The evening previous to the day of my departure from the city I went to see Miss Deemyad and her father in their house to take leave of them. There I could not help feeling obsessed with complex feelings very difficult to be described while bidding them adieu. It was beyond my imagination that in this short space of time I had already occupied a place in their hearts. From this place I proceeded to the house of Mr. Hezazi, advocate, where all my friends including Mr. Madany, and some professors were eagerly waiting. It was as late as 11 P. M. when I reached Mr. Hezazi's house where I was most warmly received by my awaiting friends. It was really a touching scene when I bade them good-bye. I was almost moved to tears when Mr. Madany kissed



Old Citadel, Mosul, Iraq.

me, and feelingly remarked, "You go away simply burning my heart." I went there with a cheerful face to say good-bye to my friends, but now returned a different man—sad and pale. This touching scene will remain ever green in my memory.

Early next morning (19th June) I left Teheran for Kazvin. In the outskirt of the city I stopped for a while before the police-outpost just to show my passport. The Police examined my passport very carefully to ascertain whether I had obtained an exit-visa in my passport. An exit-visa is absolutely necessary for anyone leaving the country, and this is available free of charge only from the Police authorities of Teheran. After the date of issue of this visa one

**Towards
Kazvin**

must leave the boundary of Iran within fifteen days, after which the life of the visa expires. Of course, it can be renewed, if necessary, but that also is to be done at Teheran (capital) and not elsewhere. The travellers have, therefore, to undergo a lot of troubles to renew the visa from outside the capital, in case they can not leave the country within the prescribed period. However, I had the visa in my passport. So the police authorities did not take much time to examine the visa and to permit me to resume my journey across the deserts. There came on my way a few tiny villages, some lying on the lap of hills. The road was as undeveloped as others, but the poor condition of the road did not cause much trouble to me, because I could take rest now and then in the village cafes. At about

noon I reached a small village where I stopped for the day in a small inn, in front of which lay a small garden of big shady trees. After lunch I came to this garden and took my seat on a bench under a tree. Ere long came up there the officer of the police-station who also chose his seat just beside me. After a long and undisturbed silence I asked him why it was that the police of Iran examined so often a day the passports and the identification cards of the travellers. He promptly replied, "it is only for the good of the people, sir. By this the Government can know beforehand the character of the travelling public, and so the mischief-mongers find little opportunities to carry out their plans." I put to him many other relevant questions, and by the by our topic of discussion turned to politics. While discussing on the subject I noticed, not a little to my surprise, his feelings of hatred against the Europeans, particularly against the British. Probably it was for a conspiracy said to have been hatched up some years ago by some of the British residents of Iran against the Iranian Government. In course of our discussion he also put to me many questions bearing on the British Rule in India. He was also curious to know of the political movements going on in our country. It gave me, indeed, a great pleasure to draw before him a vivid picture of the Indian Freedom movements. I did not also fail to relate to him in this connection the heroic stand of the peasants of Midnapore, Guzerat and Karnatak without omitting to describe the chivalrous part

played by the people of the North Western Frontier Province during our struggle for independence. I did not notice when meanwhile a small crowd had gathered round possibly to listen to us. At this stage a pitiful hue and cry rose from the nearest quarter, and without a moment's delay we all rushed to the scene which was just beside the road. A motor-bus fell into a ditch, but luckily the passengers escaped unhurt. The bus stood on the road. The place being slanting and the brake of the bus being loose it moved all on a sudden towards the ditch and fell into. The driver was absent from the place. He was highly reprimanded, when he came there after a while, by the Police officer who, however, let him off after taking a note of his license.

Next evening after the whole day's pedalling I reached Kazvin. Here I put up with an amiable

Kazvin Mollah with whom I first picked up acquaintance in Teheran. This gentleman and some other local people to whom I was introduced by my host, did not know English, and so we could not fully enjoy our mutual companionship, but their cordial behaviour left a deep impression on my mind. Though an orthodox Mollah, he had no grudge whatsoever against any other religion. On the other hand, he respected the religious sentiments of people professing different faiths. His spirit of tolerance is highly commendable indeed! It was about 9 P. M. when I was called for dinner. I took my

seat with my host along with other members of his family. The fare was very simple. It consisted of bread, curds and some fruits including cucumber and water-melon. The Iranians are very fond of curd without which their meal is seldom complete. Of the fruits the cucumber and the water-melon are their most favourite. Our meal contained no meat-preparation. The people are not so fond of meat. It was, indeed, a revelation to me that the Iranian Moslems preferred mutton to beef though dearer. Beef is generally taken by the Christians in Iran.

Kazvin is a very small town. Its houses are small and old. It is an important motor-bus terminus wherefrom buses run regularly to Teheran and Hamadan. In this town straight roads have been laid and trees have been planted on both sides of them.

After staying for the night I left the town early next morning for Hamadan. It took me only two days

to cover the distance. On the way I

On my way spent the first night in a village. Next
to Hamadan day after a long journey in the scorching sun I halted at a very small way-side

village. This place was all mountaineous. The mud-houses, in which the poor villagers lived, lay very close to one another just on the lap of a mountain. Some mountain-water was flowing down by the side of the houses. There grew up wild jungles and some fruit trees beside the water. After a little rest under a shady tree on the road I approached the water to quench my thirst. Just at that

time a motor-bus arrived there amidst loud cheers of the passengers, and instantly got down from the bus an old peasant couple. Meanwhile the sound indicating the approach of a motor-bus brought there a small band of young boys and girls, some of whom ran towards their homes to tell their beloved ones of the arrival of their grand old man. The aged people, who were there, welcomed the couple in their midst by kisses. The arrival of the couple, I noticed, animated the whole village with joy, and it could be read on their faces. It was only here that I came to notice, for the first time during my whole tour in Iran, a number of ladies in their old national dress. Of course, they too went without veils. Their costume resembled that of a woman of Central India. This village lay far, far away from any town. The people looked very poor. As a matter of fact, I could not find here anything worth the name, from which the people could derive an income for their maintenance. The only dependable source of income was probably the flocks of sheep and goats, a great number of whom, I noticed, were pasturing in the surrounding places.

In the evening (22nd June) I came down a mountain to a big valley, at a corner of which stands Hamadan. The lights of the city greeted my eyes from afar, and I felt a thrill of joy in me. The scenery through which I was now passing also presented quite a different picture. Rich with green crops the entire valley appeared to be smiling. Now,

within a short time I reached the city and stopped in the "Iran-Tour" hotel. I engaged for myself a decent room in this big hotel, costing me only five rials a day. The site of the hotel was excellent. There lay in front of it the only Municipal garden surrounded by all important buildings. This place

Hamadan is decidedly the best part of the city.

As many as seven principal roads coming from different directions have met in this place. As in other cities, here also straight roads with a row of trees on either side have been laid; as a matter of fact, a new lovely city has now sprung up in the place of the old dirty one. The population has gone up to about fifty thousand. The trade has thrived wonderfully. Many schools have, in recent years, come into being, and it is therefore regarded as one of the important educational centres of Iran. The city is situated on a plain surrounded by high mountains at a height of more than six thousand feet above the sea-level. These mountains remain ever snow-capped, even in the summer. Day in, day out, I used to enjoy from my bed in the hotel this charming scenery of the glittering snow on the peak of the mountain. Its cool climate combined with its lovely scenery—not to speak of the historical importance it once attained—draws, in large numbers, tourists and visitors, both from home and abroad.

However, after some rest I entered the restaurant of the hotel to take my dinner. Facing me was an oil-painting of H. M. Shah hanging against

the wall. I bowed down my head in great respect before this outstanding personality who by his magic touch has raised his country from sloth and slumber.

Next morning I left the hotel for the American School, the only English High School in the city, just to secure a guide who could show me round the interesting places of the city. At the sight of me, a foreigner, some students gathered round me in the school compound. I only smiled and without speaking a word made my way direct to the principal's room. I had a long talk with the principal. This amiable gentleman asked two of his senior students to take me round the city. They seemed to be very glad at it. We now moved on towards a very small hill, some half a mile away from this place. On the way we met a number of students and teachers

**Round the
Historical
Places**

of the same school who were returning by that way after their excursion to a village. The teachers of the said school often take their students to the neighbouring villages just to make them acquainted with the rural life. However, after exchanging "good-morning" with them we moved on and soon reached the hill. Here I found a big **Lion of stone** which gives forth, to the astonishment of the people, a sound like that of a drum when beaten. It is centuries old. Once, I was told, it used to be worshipped by the people of the locality. Next we proceeded to another small barren hill where we found the relics of a big **fort** of

Alexander the Great. It is said, the great Conqueror kept much of his Indian wealth concealed in it. At present nothing remains here save and except some broken portions of the wall of the fort. From this fort we went to visit a mountain, called **Jangnameh**, only five miles away from the city. Here on the body of the mountain I found a stone bearing some inscriptions of the famous kings, Darius and Xerxes. The inscriptions are very interesting indeed ! Below is given the English translation of one of them :

"A great God is Auramazda
Who created this earth,
Who created yonder heaven,
Who created man, who
Made peace for man, who
Made Darius King, the one
King of many, the one
Ruler of many. I am Darius
The Great King, the king
Of Kings. King of the
Countries which have many
Peoples, King of the great
Earth even to a far, the son
Of Hystaspes the Achæmenian."

After visiting this important historical place we now turned back towards the city. On our way back we entered a big tobacco factory, owned by the Government, where I met the brother of our Mr. M. S. Madany of Teheran who had introduced me to his brother by a letter. This Mr. Madany had

no knowledge of English, and hence he could not talk with me direct. We, therefore, talked with each other through the medium of my accompanying friends. By this time it was already noon, and so, without much delay we took leave of him. Mr. Madany, however, extended to me an invitation to dine with him, which I accepted gladly.

After lunch I was having rest in my hotel, when my Armenian friend who was one of my companions in our morning trip, called on me and wished me to pay a visit to his house. I agreed to his request. Accordingly, after treating him to tea we

left for his house where I was most cordially received by his old parents waiting at the door. I was conducted to their drawing-room where I met his smiling brothers and sisters. After some talks on this and that I was entertained with tea. These Armenians are all Christians by religion.

On returning to my hotel from the house of my Armenian friend I was glad to find Mr. Madany, his young son and an English-knowing friend of his, all awaiting me. I apologised to them for my absence. Now I lost no time to treat them to tea, after which we left for Mr. Madany's house. It was afar ; so we all got into a *Duruska*. We began to pass along narrow streets and lanes. The streets were strewn with stones. While passing along streets of this nature Mr. Madany began to describe to me the woeful picture of the old city, and he paid in this

connection high tributes to Reza Shah, the Iron-man, under whose reign the city has so wonderfully developed.

Meanwhile we reached his house. We entered it through a tunnel-like gate. We came first to a compound adjoining to Mr. Madany's, where I was introduced by my host to the female members who were present there. There was a relationship of sweet harmony prevailing among these neighbours, as, I found, some called my host their uncle, some *Duda* (elder brother) while some called him their Grand-father. After exchanging some words and smiles with them we moved on and came to his house. Here we took our seats on the carpeted floor of his drawing-room where gathered in no time all the members of his family and also some neighbours, all of whom were introduced to me one by one. After the preliminary introduction was over, an old lady came forward and asked me a lot of questions, all centring round my hearth and home: "Sisters and brothers, young man, how many may you be? Are your sisters already married? Have you got your parents living still?" I satisfied all her queries. Lastly she advised me never to miss dropping cards now and then for my relations at home and then feelingly remarked: "You won't understand how a mother feels for her child when he is not by her side." Incidentally I brought in the question of *Purdah* and asked these ladies how they liked this freedom or would they wish to go back, as before,

in seclusion behind a Purdah. To this they replied, "Can you say if any free person ever desires to be confined within a limited space?"

With the They said that they would revolt if the
Ladies Government now tried to encroach upon their freedom which had been so

long denied to them. The outspoken views of these ladies not only filled me with wonder, but they came upon me as a revelation. I asked my male-friends what they thought about this freedom of their womenfolk. They smiled and then admitted that they now quite understood what a great harm they had done to the society by keeping about half the population of their country in seclusion merely as slaves of their husbands and by refusing them the right to think and act freely. Those ladies were very anxious to know of the position of the Buddhist and the Muslim women in the Indian society. They took me, of course, for a Buddhist, because most of the people of Iran, even many educated people, do not know that there exists on earth a religion called Hinduism. Many people here maintain that India is inhabited only by the Buddhists. However, in reply to their questions I now began to tell them about the pitiable lots of our Muslim and Hindu women. A gloom, I noticed, came over their faces when they heard the pathetic story of their sisters in India, but a sweet smile flashed on their lips when I described to them how our revered Mahatmaji has been able to bring about a revolutionary change in the outlook of the

people, and at whose great inspiration the Indian women have now given up their age-long lethargy, as a result of which our country is fast progressing to its destined goal. Meanwhile a good long time had rolled by. So we hastened to take our dinner after which I came back to my lodge.

It was the 24th of June. Early in the morning I left the city of Hamadan on my bike for *Kermanshah*. It was all dull—the same kind of unsmooth road and the same kind of barren hills all over the way. It seemed all joyless monotony. Despite these I pushed on. After the night's halt in a wayside inn I resumed my journey early next morning. It was evening when I reached **Kermanshah**. Here I put up in a garage-hotel.

Kermanshah is a very small town. It **Kermanshah** is at present under a new plan of development. It is the biggest town near the Irano-Iraqian frontier. The place is noted for the Petroleum Refinery of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

It was in this town that I decided to leave for Iraq by this Frontier. Accordingly, after about thirty six hours of rest I left the town. It was morning—the 27th of June. At mid-day I reached a small village and stopped before a restaurant to take my lunch. The scenery surrounding the place was a lovely one. Mountain-water was flowing down by its side. Beside it grew up a good variety of shady trees. Here I sat under the cool shade of a tree and asked the waiter of the restaurant to serve me there.

Yonder were playing some children with dust in the too scorching sun of the summer. While my eyes were fixed upon the scene, an aged lady appeared and caught hold of a boy from behind and dealt then and there some such smart slaps on his face that the boy at once burst into a loud cry. At once I was reminded of some such scenes in my own village home. My mind revolted against the action of the lady, probably the mother of the kid. However, after eating my lunch I left the place. Now I began to pedal down the high mountains to go over to the plain lands of Iraq. While turning round at the bends, I had to be very, very careful, because these bends are the veritable danger-spots for the cyclists and the car-drivers. In the evening I came to Khasrabi, the frontier of Iran, down the mountains, over 5000 feet high. Now, came into sight on both sides of the road the camps of the soldiers. Without caring to stop anywhere I moved on and soon reached the premises of the Customs House, through which the road runs to the Iraqi Frontier. Here, my passport and the box were examined by the authorities of the Customs office, after which the gate opened for my exit from Iran for entrance into Iraq.

IRAQ

Iraq

Soon I reached Manjari, the Iraqi frontier where stands the Customs Office of Iraq. This Iraqi Customs House lies at a distance of only half a mile from the Iranian Customs Office at Khasrabi where ends the boundary of Iran. In between these two

Customs Houses occur no localities.

In the At Manjari also I noticed several
Frontier camps of the Iraqi soldiers guarding the freedom of their country.

Before long I reached the Customs House of Iraq, where the authorities examined my passport. They also examined the contents of my suit-case to see if I were carrying any dutiable good. It was, however, done with expedition. After obtaining from them a permit in my passport I left for Khanaqin, the nearest town, lying some four miles away from the Frontier. Meanwhile a thick darkness had descended on earth, covering the entire landscape. At this time I found myself cycling along an asphalted road. It unconsciously drew my mind to the bright side of the British rule. The Britishers, whatever may be said for or against them, know how to live life—beautifully and comfortably. Wherever they have gone, they have built miles and miles of railways, asphalted roads, and have thereby made communication easier and travelling more comfortable. They are ever keen to bring

within reach the amenities of life—a thing which prominently struck me when I arrived at this Frontier of Iraq after travelling thousands of miles along hopelessly unsmooth roads across the deserts in Iran.

Meanwhile, I reached the Police-station of the Customs House at Khanaqin standing just on the road. Here I was stopped by a police-man and taken to his officer. They examined things in my suit-case, and then enquired if I had any license from their Government for carrying a cycle in their country. As I had none, they asked me to furnish a personal security against sale of the bike in their country. It was, on the face of it, absurd for me to find out anybody for the purpose. However generous, who would come forward to do me the favour in a land where I was a stranger ? I told the officer about my

Khanaqin difficulties, who appreciated them and was satisfied with an undertaking from me. And he himself agreed to stand surety for me. No one can enter this country with a cycle without paying for it the necessary Customs duty. The law permits the owner of a cycle to carry it with him provided he furnishes a security to the effect that he won't sell it in the country. Hence the Customs Officer would not be able, even if he were so willing, to let me carry it in violation of their law. But for his generosity I would, therefore, have been in a serious trouble to carry my cycle with me.

It was now about 10 P. M. when I entered the town. But for the municipal light here and there,

there was nothing to relieve the monotony of my eyes. A stillness was prevailing everywhere. Not a single man was to be found on the road. It looked all deserted. There were innumerable date-trees on both sides of the path leading to a market.

While walking along this path I recalled a vivid picture of my own village where also I was quite familiar with such paths running in a zigzag course—now through small jungles and now by the side of cottages. The only difference, I noticed, was that while my village could boast of no municipal light, it could. I was going on along this path and was asking my mind as to why I was not the least troubled by my ghost-mania though alone in such stillness of the night, while with all my attempts I would not be able to keep the thought of a ghost at arms length in my village-home even in the early hours of the night ! I remember, if I were to be sent on an errand to a neighbouring house at nightfall, I would be unable to summon courage enough to do it. It is funny indeed, I am the very same man, travelling from place to place even in the dark hours of the night, and while doing so I am never for a moment haunted by my fear of ghosts. Indeed, I am never a believer in supernatural elements, but all the same I suffer from the mania while in my village-home.

Soon I came to the market, a distance of about a mile from the Customs Police-station. The restaurants were still open, many of which, I found, were crowded with customers listening to the gramophone-

records. By this time I was both tired and hungry. So, I entered a restaurant. Round my table sat two young Arabs, having their meals. They looked quite intelligent. They were in their own national costume which consists of a loose garment resembling a gown with an over-coat of very very fine cloth on and a head-dress containing a piece of cloth whose skirts rest on the back. On this head-dress is placed a robe, generally of dark colour, round the head lest it be taken away by the wind. The robe is called *Ogal*. Here is, indeed, a striking contrast between the Iraqians and

An the Iranians although professing the same
Outstanding faith and inhabiting the neighbouring
Contrast countries. While the former is out and
out conservative representing the
medieval age, the latter is quite up-to-date. While the former, in my opinion, is so slow to adapt to the fast changes of time, the latter is ever responsive to it. While in Iran the women have cast off their purdah, the women of Iraq have retained it with great love and respect ; while the former is so smart and moves about so freely, the latter prefers to be confined within the four walls of their homes, ministering to the whims and pleasures of their husbands and brothers. Still both are neighbours, both profess the same faith, and both are proud of their old civilisation. An outstanding contrast indeed !

Now, the entire atmosphere in the restaurant seemed new. The people did not look so neat and clean. They were so unclean in their habits that one of the two

young men, who sat by my side, spat just on the spot. Several people were smoking their *hookkas* through long pipes. However, I asked the waiter without loss of time to serve me a plate of polao with kebab. After dinner I came to a hotel standing just beside the restaurant. The sign-board of the hotel was in English, and so I had no difficulty to locate it. I got in and engaged a small room for seventy-five fils a day [1000 fils make one Dinar equivalent to £1 (sterling). About seventy-five fils make one Rupee]. Compared with Iran the living in Iraq is dearer—a fact which is evident from this. The room which I engaged for rupee one per day, could be easily available for annas four only a day in Iran. The food-stuff also sells cheaper in Iran than in Iraq.

Next morning while going to the railway-station to have my breakfast in the restaurant, I heard a sudden call from behind; it was in Hindusthani. I turned round and found a young Indian running towards me. He soon came and introduced himself as an employee in an oil-factory. We both now went to the station and had our breakfast. As we were taking tea, some curious clerks of the station gathered round my table with many a query. They seemed very inquisitive about myself. Happily, all of them knew English. They took me to their office where almost the whole staff of the station assembled. My Indian friend had meanwhile left for his business. These gentlemen were very inquisitive to hear from me an account of my travels in different lands. Thus, I had to pass a

good long time in their pleasant company. I was going to take leave of them when arrived there the chief telegraphist of the Station who was all the more eager to pass sometime in my company. He began to press me to have my lunch with him. At long last I acceded to his request. He took me to his office, where after a little while he began to cook food himself on the stove. In the mean time we fell to talking, and I came to gather it from him that he was transferred to the place on a short notice and that he had joined office only the day before. As he had to hasten to the place, he could not arrange, in the midst of hurry, to bring with him his family. This gentleman was really a very good soul and was social to the core. The food was meanwhile prepared—it was very simple, of course. Lunch over, I bade my friend good bye, but before that I thanked him heartily for his hospitality although I knew, no thanks were too much for it.

Khanaqin is a very small town. It is the terminus of the Baghdad—Khanaqin railway. The streets are as dirty as anything. Most of the buildings are small and one-storeyed. They are built of mud-bricks, because a brick-factory is hardly to be found in this part of the country.

It was mid-day—the 28th of June when I left Khanaqin on my cycle for Baghdad, the capital, lying at a distance of about one hundred miles. The road runs across small deserts where hardly a tree is visible to shelter a traveller from the scorching sun. It is a

vast plain. On the way I came across some small villages, very poor in outlook. The houses are made of mud and date leaves. As in Iran, the only source of income of these desert-people is their sheep and goats, found in large numbers pasturing in the barren fields. Horse is their domestic animal. Many own camels as well. Almost every boy can ride a horse, and most of the people know how to fire a gun. These villagers are very, very daring—a thing which is writ large on their faces.

**Enroute to
Baghdad**

The road was miserably poor,—poorer even than those of Iran. However, after the day's journey I reached a small town in the evening, and passed the night in a hotel; it cost me only fifty fils. Happily, I had no difficulty whatever in locating the hotel here. Some people of this town know English and there are some who know Hindusthani too. Of course, most of the people speak French and especially Turkish which they learnt while under the Uttoman Empire before the Great War when the Turkish rule was replaced by the British. Hindusthani they learnt from the Indian soldiers who shed their blood on this soil of Mesopotamia in fighting for the British against the Turks.

Next morning (29th June) I left the town, and pedalling for almost the whole day against tremendous odds I reached at last Baghdad, the capital. The sun was yet in the western horizon. Here I stopped in a hotel on the Al-Rashid street. It was a middle

class hotel at best. I engaged for me a small room for eighty fils a day. It is in India alone that we are not supplied with any bed in the middle class hotels. But almost everywhere outside India the guests are provided in hotels, small or big, with a complete set of beds, and for this nothing is charged extra.

Baghdad is one of the oldest city of Mesopotamia, now called Iraq. It stands on both sides of the Tigris, probably the biggest river in the Near East. The population of the city is about two hundred and fifty thousand. The streets and lanes are not so neat and clean, but almost all streets are asphalted. At present the city is undergoing a great development. The most important road of the city is the Al-Rashid street, undoubtedly the longest road running from one end of the city to the other. Important shops, restaurants, hotels, cinema-houses, dancing-halls, banks, offices, and some foreign Legations—all stand on this road. The Al-Rashid Street has merged into a road, called the New Street

running just by the bank of the river. Here on the bank of the river have been placed some benches for the visitors to sit on and enjoy the lovely mornings and the evenings. It is admittedly the best place in the city for strolls. Many a new street has, of late, come into being. They are all of modern style ; with a row of trees on either side of them and with a small garden in the middle these streets are picturesque indeed ! The city has some parks as well.

The buildings are mostly small and built of sunned bricks. In the old city the houses are congested, and most of them are old-styled. The sanitary arrangements are far from satisfactory. The lanes and drains are too dirty to be described. There is absolutely no arrangement for cleaning the latrines; they are cleaned not even once a year. Stools accumulate and accumulate in the ditch till it is filled up after a lapse of two years or more when only it is removed. It is, therefore, a regular ordeal for a person, when, by nature's call he has got to sit for a while in a latrine. And what is worse still, of all places the site for this earthly paradise is chosen somewhere beside the gate, or by the side of the stair-case if it is a two-storeyed building. It is indeed something unthinkable in this twentieth century! But in the buildings built on modern style, proper sanitary arrangements have been provided. The latest extensions of the city are, of course, quite beautiful. There the buildings are all of modern style. New roads have been laid, and on both sides of them have been planted rows of trees, while in the middle of many a new street a garden with footpaths is seen.

Baghdad, once a city of light and lore, whose name is associated with the *Arabian Nights*, a centre of a great civilisation and culture that

Museums sprang up on the deltas of the Tigris and the Euphrates, tells but a poor tale at present of its glorious past. To-day it can boast, at best, of two small museums of which the National

Museum of Iraq is bigger and well worth a visit. It contains many historical things of the Babylonian and the Assyrian civilisations, some of which date as far back as the 3000 B. C. The city is also proud of its bridge named "Maud Bridge" across the Tigris. It is a floating bridge, smaller in breadth than our Howrah-bridge over the Ganges. It is about half a mile long. Like the Howrah-bridge it can also be open to allow steamers and boats to pass through. The people boast of this bridge ; because, in their opinion it is without a parallel in the East. I did not, however, disturb their self-complacency.

After some rest in my hotel I came out to take an evening stroll along the New Street. It was already crowded from one end to the other with heterogeneous visitors of different nationalities and faiths. It was really an interesting sight to see a good many young couples having their strolls in cross-arms. Probably, some of them were enjoying their

honey-moon too. The Muslim couples

Whither could be distinguished from others

Iraq ? only by the veils the ladies had on their faces, otherwise it would be, indeed,

difficult for the foreign visitors to know who was who. Recently almost all educated Mohammedans have adopted the European costume, even the ladies not excepted ; only the latter have yet retained their veils. Of course, the veil, which the young ladies put on, is so thin that it can hardly save them from identi-

fication. Maybe, they have essentially not much faith in the veil. As a matter of fact, many ladies have given up the purdah once for all. Many of them have even taken to lip-stick. when I found these young Muslim ladies in European costume with high-heeled shoes, of course, with thin veils on, moving merrily and freely, I asked myself : "Whither is Iraq going ? Is she following in the footprints of Iran and Turkey ?" The citadel of conservatism in Iraq has already shaken ; maybe, it will collapse one day entirely, for which indications are not wanting.

However, after a long walk I came before a restaurant where I sat on a chair placed outside under the blue canopy of the sky. It was a lovely night. The moon was smiling with all her charms and beauties. Cool breeze also was blowing. A gramophone was entertaining the customers. The songs, of course, were all in Arabic. Nevertheless I enjoyed the music amidst the solemn stillness of the night. Yonder was the river Tigris flowing on and on, under whose bidding nobody knows. I looked at the other bank of the Tigris. A great number of tress, probably date trees, caught my eyes, and from their midst some lights were speaking of the localities there. On the river were several small boats in which I noticed some couples—some chatting and some singing. The sound of oars, which is ever sweet to my ear, was floating over to me. The landscape now presented an excellent view, which absorbed me in thoughts although I am never a philosopher nor am I much of a

devotee. As a matter of fact, I never care to go into intricate details or meanings of this creation. But strangely enough, I could not keep my mind back from running into a philosophic trance. I asked myself : "Is not this whole earth obeying the order of One Supreme Being ?"

Now my eyes were suddenly caught by a bonfire on this bank near the ghat, a few yards off from my seat. I felt curious to see it ; so I left my seat and approached the scene. I found some people burning a big fish, which they had just caught, and arranging for a feast. Meanwhile, some young men turned up. It was surprising, without loss of time they took off their clothes before us all and flinging them aside jumped straight into the river. This river is very mild. At no time of the year it experiences waves, although it is very deep. But it has got, I was told, a strong under-current, as a result of which many a casualty occurs. I now returned to my place where I found beside me a young gentleman. After sometime the gentleman broke his silence and asked me

Gandhi some questions, of course all centring
& round my own self. On my query he
Nehru introduced himself as an Inspector of
schools in Iraq. Politically he was a
Socialist. In course of our talks on politics this my new friend wanted me to tell him something of our beloved Nehruji,—of his political philosophy if any and his activities. Pandit Jawaharlalji, I came to learn from him and some others, is known to many Iraqi and Syrian

Socialists who, I was told, publish now and then extracts from his speech in their organs. It was really a delightful information to me. For Nehruji, although a very popular leader of India, is, I found, little known beyond the borders of Hindusthan. Even the name of the Indian National Congress is unknown to many in this country. It is our revered Gandhiji alone who, I found, is known almost to every Arab and he is greatly respected, probably more respected than in his own native land, so much so that many Arabs, I was told, utter the name of Gandhiji with the same amount of love and reverence with which they utter the name of their great Prophet Mohammed. Many of them even think that Gandhiji is the soul of all sorts of movements, social, economic or political, in India. I was feeling very weak ; probably it was due to my day's journey. And so I took leave of my friend rather early and left for my lodge. On the way I was very glad to meet a young Indian who was a companion of mine during my voyage between Karachi and Bushire. I was too tired to talk with him ; so I requested him to call at my place next day, and then proceeded direct to my hotel.

Next morning I called on His Excellency the Minister of Education, but unfortunately I could not

Education exchange any word with him ; because he was absolutely ignorant of English just as I was in Arabic and French, which two languages, of course, he knew quite well. As in

Iran, here also most of the educated people have a fair knowledge of French ; of course their mother-tongue is Arabic. However, I called on the Director of Education who was a fluent speaker of English. I had a long, long talk with him on the system of Education. I was given to learn that the country was making much progress in the sphere of education, particularly since when they became independent by a treaty and entered the League of Nations (1932) as an independent State. The progress which the country has so far attained against tremendous odds is evident from the following statistics :—

1921

Educational Institutions	Students	Female Students	Literacy
162	8000	x	2 p.c.

1937

Educational Institutions	Students	Female Students	Literacy
956	114253	26804	8 p. c.

In 1937, the Government spent for education nearly $\frac{1}{10}$ th of the total income which amounted to about three and a half million sterling. The population of the country

is about three million. The country is divided into fourteen provinces ; each is called *Liwa*. H. M. Ghazi, the son of late King Faisal, is the present King of the country. His Majesty is assisted in the matter of

King administration by a Cabinet of Ministers
& and the Parliament. H. M. has rights
the Cabinet of prerogative by which he can
override any decision of the Parliament and also of his Cabinet, but seldom does he use his prerogative in the matter of administration. The system of education in this country is much similar to that pursued in France. Co-education obtains in the primary schools but not in the high schools.* But there is a section of educationists who would prefer co-education in all the stages. They sincerely believe that it is the segregation of the girls from the boys at the advanced stage of education that makes boys and girls more inquisitive of each other—a thing that does not ultimately lead to the well-being of the nation which is aimed at. Co-education in all stages, they think, gives both sexes an opportunity to think, learn and grow up under natural environments, and thus the aim and object of education can, in their opinion, be better realised.

There is no college in this country to provide facilities for higher education, and so the aspiring students have to proceed for the purpose either to

*Religion is taught in every educational institution. The military education also is imparted to the students.

India or to Syria where they can be admitted to the famous University of Beirut. But that is very expensive. So, it is only the rich people who can afford to pay for higher education. In every educational institution here, as in many other independent countries, the students have to sing their own national anthem before they commence their routine-work, and

Patriotism they are taught to love their mother-land even at the cost of their lives.

& It is also instilled into their minds that

Students patriotism is not a crime. But so it was while they were under the Turkish

and the British rule, and there is nothing unnatural about it. The foreign master must try to destroy altogether the patriotic flash and feeling of a subject people ; otherwise how can it be possible for them to rule over the country for a long time ?

In the afternoon some Indians called on me in my hotel. After some chats they wanted me to accompany them to the Indian Association. I readily agreed and got myself dressed immediately to follow them. Soon we came to the Maud Bridge and across it to the

King Faisal street which is so called

The Indian after the name of the late King of Iraq.

Association This is decidedly the best street of the city of Baghdad. With innumerable

date trees on both sides and a garden in the middle, the street presents a lovely appearance indeed ! On this side of the river has grown up a small town, and it has added to the importance of the capital city.



A Syrian Girl

The houses here are scattered and the traffic is not congested at all. And so the entire atmosphere seems calm and quiet. The eastern railway station of Baghdad stands here. This railway connects the capital city with Basrah, admittedly the biggest port of Iraq on the Persian Gulf, wherefrom the ships ply to India. There is also an aerodrome in this part of the city which has added greatly to its importance.

We now reached the Indian Association. The house is one-storeyed. It contains several rooms with a big hall. The hall and a few well-furnished rooms have been set apart for use by the Association and others are open to hire. The Association subscribes almost all the important English Dailies of India. Meetings are organised now and then under the auspices of this association when all Indians irrespective of communities and faiths meet and discuss matters in an atmosphere of amity and concord. The canker of communalism never raises its ugly head here although attempts are made now and then by religious fanatics to disturb the friendly atmosphere. And this is so because the Indians here consider themselves as Indians first. The Indians living in this city number about five hundred, most of whom serve in the British Army. There are also some prominent merchants. The Association was formed in the very beginning of this century, and since then it has been growing in strength day by day.

As we arrived at the threshold of the building, some young men, among whom was also Mr. Das of

the British Consulate, the general secretary of the Association, came forward to receive me, a stranger and visitor both. I was then introduced to them all. We now sat round a table in the open compound of the Association and then engaged ourselves in milk and water discourses. Thus, after passing a long time in their company I stood up to bid them good-night, when the secretary wished me again and again to give a talk on my travels before the Indians of the city. As they were so earnest, I agreed.

Next evening accompanied by Mr. Das I arrived at the meeting held in the open compound of the Association. The gathering was fairly large and of a cosmopolitan character. There were Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Parsees, both male and female. There were some children too. Now, the atmosphere looked thoroughly Indian. And I was naturally very glad to find myself in the midst of so many countrymen of mine. I was introduced to the audience by Mr. Das, after which I commenced my speech. I spoke in English for about an hour and a half. The lecture over, I was presented with a purse by Mr. Das on behalf of the Association, which I most gratefully accepted. The meeting was now over and the gathering was treated to light refreshments.

On my return to the hotel I met an Indian who also was staying in the same. He was a representative of a Film Company of Bombay. He came to Iraq to find a market for his films. But unfortunately

he could not obtain a permit from the government to sell his films, and this, he said, was because the government had already formed a low impression of the Indian films from certain Indian pictures of a very low standard imported by the cinema authorities of Baghdad. "If so, the Indian

Indian Films in Iraq Film Companies themselves are to blame", so said I in reply. It is from the films that most of the educated

people now-a-days form their ideas about the general taste and outlook of a society. So, by exporting rotten films abroad the Indian Film Companies not only spoil their foreign market, but also spoil the fair name of India. India requires at present a vigorous propaganda for her in the foreign countries, and so the Indian Film Companies should exercise more judicious care in selecting films to be exported abroad.

Next morning came Mr. Maneckji, an Indian Parsee, to my hotel and began to press me to put up with him. He argued how they could allow me to stay in a hotel when they my countrymen were there. As he would listen to no excuses, I had to agree at last. So I quickly packed up my things, paid off the hotel bill, and accompanied him. We got into a small motor-bus. Such buses can accommodate at best four passengers, but for the sake of money the bus-driver lets in as many passengers as he can. The place wherefor we were bound is called Hinaidi lying at a distance of some six miles from the city. From

early morning till late hours of the night the buses keep running between these two places. The fare also is not much. It is only ten fils a trip.

Soon we reached Hinaidi. I was taken direct to the house of one Mr. N. C. Das where I was very cordially received by him and some other Bengalees who gathered there. Mr. Das had already arranged with Mr. Maneckji on the previous night that I should be his guest, to which Maneckji consented. Mr. Maneckji is a confirmed bachelor. He went to Iraq during the Great War, and ever since he has been serving in the British Army. He is a very good sportsman and very social. The other friends, whom I met here, also came to Iraq to fight for the British during the war and since then they also have been serving in the Army. In the British Army in Iraq, almost all employees, I found, are Indians, most of whom went there during the war.

Hinaidi is only a British Cantonment. It spreads over a vast area. Altogether there are three such British Cantonments in this country. The second one stands in Basrah, the chief port of Iraq, while the third lies in the interior of the country. Attached to these cantonments there are military aerodromes too. All these cantonments are under the direct control of the British military authorities. Most of the regiments here are composed mainly of the Kurdish soldiers. These Kurds are the mountain-people of Iraq. They are wonderfully laborious,

very, very brave and loyal just as our Indian Gurkhas. They are probably the best fighting people in the whole near east. These people don't look so stalwart, but they are so hardy and strong that I was simply astonished when I first found an ordinary Kurdish labourer carrying on his back quite easily a load weighing about three to four maunds. Like the Jews these Kurds also were assured during the war of a settlement by the British and other Allies. The contribution of these Kurds in defeating the Turks in the battle fields of Mesopotamia was not a little. But it is a pity that they have been denied their just claim for a settlement once assured during the stormy days of the war.

The British have organised a great military force in Iraq, and they are capable of coping with any situation that may arise. The airforce of the British in Iraq is probably all the more perfect. They can bombard, if they so wish, the whole of Iraq at a moment's notice and can deprive the Iraqians of their independence. Of course, the Iraqi Government also may not be, in that case, a silent observer. They also have been for sometime past building up fighting planes and aerodromes. Indeed, owing to their economic stringency they can not allot adequate funds for the purpose, but they are raising money for the same by lotteries. Still their military strength is nothing compared to that of the British in their country. So, these Iraqians are independent

**Military
Strength of
Iraq**

only in their home-affairs. They have but little voice in their foreign affairs where the British diplomacy predominates.

While in Hinaidi, I used to find almost every night the British military aircraft patrolling the city of Baghdad. It was and still is a problem to me why the British Government spend so much money for maintaining a huge military establishment in Iraq. Is it all for the maintenance of peace and tranquillity of the country? Possibly not. The reason may be that the British, by maintaining a huge army, especially a strong airforce in Iraq, can better safeguard their position in India against an attack from the west. Again, the Suez Canal, strategically the most important place and gateway to India, will remain ever safe for the British so long their airforce is here.

**Why the
British
maintain a
strong air-
force in
Iraq**

It strikes many why the British do not care to maintain a strong airforce in India; some even accuse them of their negligence in the matter. But I am afraid, their accusations cannot stand scrutiny of facts. All the gateways to India are well protected, some by nature and some by the British. From the north there cannot possibly be any invasion; there stands the impenetrable Himalayas. And in the south there is practically none to attack India. Then remain the east and the west. In the east, China will not be in a position for a long, long time to come to attack India. Of course, Japan can invade India, but they too can not do so

until and unless they conquer the whole of China or until they succeed in defeating the British in their battle first in Hongkong and then in Singapore. From the west also no nation can attack India direct. Afghanistan and Iran are not at present in a position, nor will they be so in the near future, to fight against the British in India. Still if they so wish, the British are strong enough to fight and crush them. Then come Italy and other western powers who can possibly attack India, but they too, I think, will not find it an easy task to do so. They will have to meet the British forces first in Iraq and also in the Suez which is so strongly protected by the combined naval and air-forces of the British in the Mediterranean, in Africa and in the Near East. So, why the British Government maintain such a huge army in Iraq is quite significant.

In the afternoon came one Mr. Mazumdar, an employee in the cantonment hospital, to take me to the houses of two other Bengalee gentlemen, Mr. Mazumdar and Mr. Deb who were next door neighbours. Mr. Das, my host, also kindly accompanied me. We were warmly received by both Mr. Mazumdar and Mr. Deb.

This Mr. Deb is a renowned sportsman in Iraq. Much to his credit, he has won very many trophies. And Mr. Mazumdar, an employee in the army, is an amiable gentleman, perfectly social. I found their wives also very social and as smart as their husbands. Within a few minutes we became chummy,

so much so that it would be difficult for an outsider to know that I was at all a stranger in their midst. Although shy even at home, especially in the society of ladies, it is really strange that I became in no time friendly to the ladies here and actually began to call

Mrs. Mazumdar and Mrs. Deb as **In homely environments** 'Boudi.'* And these my *Boudies* were also in their turn too quick to reciprocate my feelings by beginning to call me as '*Thakurpo*'.† Their kiddies also began to call me as '*Kaka Babu*'‡ and asked me thousand and one childish questions. Thus, I found myself in homely environments, and for the time being I really forgot, while in their midst, that I was at all in a foreign land far, far away from my sweet home, and that rivers and mountains had kept me away from my beloved motherland.

However, we were soon treated to tea, after which we sat down to play at cards. My partner was Mrs. Deb. while Mr. Das's was Mrs. Mazumdar; the rest were watching our play. All of us save and except Mr. Deb and his wife hailed from Eastern Bengal. Mr. Deb was a domiciled Bengalee in Allahabad. We played and played and did not notice how meanwhile a long time had slipped away.

**Boudi*—An elder brother's wife is so addressed in Bengalee families

† *Thakurpo*—The husband's younger brother is so addressed.

‡ *Kaka Babu*—uncle (the father's younger brother).

It was as late as 10 P. M. So, we were going to say good-night to our friends, but Mrs. Deb would not let us part without having our meals with them. At last we had to accede to her request. And without loss of time we sat for dinner round a table in the open compound and were promptly served. We did not know at all when she had instructed her cook to prepare our meals. It was a sumptuous dinner consisting of pure Bengalee dishes. Naturally my joy knew no bounds to partake of a Bengalee meal after a long, long time, as I had no occasion to taste Bengalee food ever since I left Bengal.

The following morning a Bengalee Mohammedan gentleman called at my place. He was an employee in an army-launch that plied in the Tigris. Though not educated in the literal sense, he was no doubt a perfect gentleman and undoubtedly a man of broad views. He was thick and thin with the Hindu Bengalees here. The children would call him their uncle, and he also treated them with the affections of an uncle. He used to call Mrs. Deb and Mrs. Mazumdar as '*Boudi*' and regarded them as such. Often he would come with sweets and fruits for their children. Likewise he also was treated with love and respect. It was indeed a delightful news to me that this sweet relationship was never for a day disturbed during this long period of their stay in this country. However, after some talks our topic turned to home-affairs. In course of our conversations he said : "you see, we are a bit too conservative in our social outlook

and much too fanatic in matters religious. We attach an undue importance to the utterances of our Mollahs and Priests who are ever jealous to keep up their own positions even at the expense of others. These self-seeking Priests and Mollahs always try to exploit the ignorant people, and to serve their selfish ends they don't feel any qualms of conscience even to incite a brother against a brother. Tell me, can anybody want his brother's blood? Certainly not.

A Bengalee Pray, do the Hindus, the Muslims, the
Mohammedan Sikhs and the Christians ever like
 & conscientiously to murder one another?

his broad This is impossible. But that is what
views these Priests and Mollahs, in common
 with some other fanatic people, incite

us to do. So these must go, nay, they must be crushed, root and branch, so that we can hereafter build an undivided India". He paused a little and then said again, "Well, who are the pure Mohammedans? Ourselves, or the Arabs, the Persians or the Turks? We, the Hindu converts, or the Arabs, the descendants of our great Prophet? Well, if we grant that the Arabs are the genuine Muslims, why do they not rush with knives, as in India, when music passes at the time of *nemaj* by a mosque? Is there any difference at all between music in India and music in Arabia, music of a Hindu and music of a non-Hindu?" I kept silent, but was struck to see such liberal views of a simple countryman of mine. He went on, "What would it come to, my dear friend,

if the Government of India had banned the mourning processions during the holy *Mohurram*? I shudder to think of the consequences! But what do we see here in Iraq, the land of our Prophet? There was no fuss, not even a whisper when His Majesty by his proclamation in 1936 completely banned all kinds of mourning processions commemorating the death of Great Hassan and Hossain. Processions were banned even in Karbala, the holiest pilgrimage of the Muslim world, but for this no protest whatever was made against the Government. On the other hand, the people of the country carried out to the letter the wishes of their beloved King, although individually many resented the action of the Government. Now, look at Iran and Turkey and mark how the people there have done away with the purdah. And see even here in Iraq, our sacred land, how the ladies are gradually following in the footprints of their neighbours, Iran and Turkey, in the matter? But where are we in this respect? You see, last year I went home and wanted to eliminate the purdah from my family. I argued with the ladies of my family and tried to persuade them to discard their veils, but unfortunately met with little success. Our age-long conservatism is not to go. The revered ladies of my family argued with me that they could not go against what their Prophet hath said. Thus I failed to bring about a change in the outlook of the womenfolk even in my own family. And what is funny, I could not succeed in getting even my own

wife to support me in this respect." He paused, and I thought, he had finished his say. But he began again, and this time on Indian politics. "What, after all", said he, "is the contribution of the Indian Muslims to our struggles for independence? Not much, surely. It is however a happy sign that the young Muslims are gradually realising their duty and are trying side by side with other communities to do something for the freedom of their motherland. And what an irony, while the Indian Muslims are so keen to guard the interests of the outside Muslims, they themselves are looked down upon by the very same Muslims only because of their political slavery. Then again, the Indians, especially the Muslims have been demonstrating their protest against the British policy in Palestine, and over this issue they almost know no sleep and appetite. But I do not know if any Arab of Palestine or of Iraq did care at all to voice their sympathy for the Indians during the recent Indian struggles for independence in 1930 and 1932. On the other hand, the Governments of these countries are raising limitations upon limitations to make it uncomfortable for the Indians to live in their lands. Leave aside these questions, can you say if the Governments of Iran and Turkey, the neighbouring countries, are making any protest whatever against the partition of Palestine, their holy land. They are independent, and so their voices are likely to be felt by the British Government. But instead of doing anything of the sort they have thought it wise to keep

silent in the matter. Maybe, they find very little time for others to spare but for themselves."

It was mid-day now. The day was too hot. The sun seemed to be blazing outside. This my Muslim friend now stood up to leave for his house, but before his departure he asked Mr. Das, who came back just then from his office, to go to his place in the afternoon whence they would go for fishing in the Tigris. Fishing, I was told, was a favourite hobby of Mr. Das.

At about five in the afternoon we three—Mr. Das, Mr. Mazumdar (Hospital) and myself, along with our Muslim friend left with two fishing nets for the Tigris. The river was not very far off, only half a mile away from the place. At the army steamer-ghat we took a small boat to cross over to the sandy island. On reaching there we began to walk on along the water-mark. Mr. Das and our Muslim brother were busy throwing nets into the river while Mr. Mazumdar and myself were watching it with

Fishing in pleasure. At times they went down
the Tigris into waist-deep water just to throw
their nets into deeper water. This
kind of nets is called '*Jhaki Jal*' which covers, when
thrown, a wide space in a circular form. My friends
Mr. Das and the Muslim fellow seemed to be masters
in the art of throwing nets—a thing with which
I was not so acquainted. But I was not a mere
spectator. I was collecting with great interest fish from
the meshes in a bag. We toiled and moiled here for
about an hour, but almost for nothing. We could not

mesh many fish. So, we left for the other bank of the river. On arriving there we began to move on towards the north along the side of the water, throwing nets here and there. Thus we came to a *bathing ghat* where gathered some ladies to have their bath. These ladies were watching with curiosity our ways of fishing with a net ; some of them even came forward, out of curiosity indeed, just to peep into our fish-bag. By this time the night fell. It was a moon-lit night. The moon with all her charms and beauties had already appeared on the horizon and shed her cool light all over the earth. This moon-light falling on the innumerable date trees and also on the water below created a lovely scenery indeed. There was solemn stillness all around. And in such stillness my mind began to roam about. I now recalled vividly some happy days of my boyhood I spent in my own native land where I passed with my friends many an hour in such lovely moon-lit nights in small boats in our too familiar Dhaleswari. Now I remembered also a day of my naughty self. I was in my teens when in one such moon-lit night I was one of a party of my friends out to steal some fish from a pond of our neighbouring village. I remember, we stood afar, when one of our friends was throwing his net into the pond, just to help him to do the matter silently but successfully. But it was not to be. The sound caused by the falling of the net into the water brought the owner of the pond to the scene ; probably he was awake. He came stealthily,

and our leader was caught red-handed while withdrawing the net from the water. Then a tussle ensued between the two, and immediately came up there some three or four young men to hear the voices of the old man before we reached the scene to help our friend. Now our courage failed to see them, and we ran away immediately leaving our friend to his fate. Here we followed to the letter and spirit of the popular saying, "He is wise who runs away." But I was really very sorry that I could not stand by my friend in need. However, he was let off with a warning not to do so in future. I now smiled to remember this day of my life after a long, long time.

It was now about ten. It was all still. This stillness of the night was at times being disturbed by the barking of some dogs. Our labour for so many hours was hardly fruitful, for we could not still get our bag full. But my friends were not to go home without catching a bag-ful of fish. So we crossed by the boat to our bank. Here they began to catch big fish in large numbers, and soon our bag became full. At this time we heard some voices at a distance. Mr. Das whispered into our ears that it was probably the voice of *Chowkidars*. So saying he and the Moslem friend took up nets on their shoulders in good haste, and we all instantly disappeared from the place. A fishing tax is levied on all fishermen who use this river. So the *Chowkidars* are there to guard the interests of the tax-payers.

We soon reached the house of our Muslim friend and after changing our clothes in his house bade him good-night. Now arose a question between myself and Mr. Das as to what we should be doing with all these fish, as the moslem friend and Mr. Mazumdar had taken but a little share of the fish. Who would cook these fish, was the problem. None were to be found for the purpose. Our Iraqi cook would not do it, because the Iraqians neither take nor touch,—I don't know why, maybe out of superstition,—a *Tangra* fish which has three needle-like sharp arms, two on both sides and the third on the back. At last we decided to help ourselves in the matter. It is amusing indeed that the whole night passed away to prepare our food. So expert we were ! The dinner, for which we took so much time and trouble, had at last to be taken at day-break !

In the afternoon I was down with fever, probably caused by the tormenting bites of the sunflies. A sunfly is very, very small—so small that it is hardly visible. They have an easy access into a mosquito-net. They look grey. Their biting is very bitter. They are familiar all over Iraq and Syria.

I had been confined to bed for three days, all dull and monotonous and especially so when Mr. Das and his servant were out. At this time I would naturally feel within me a craving to see my relations and have them at my beside, but let it not be thought that Mr. Das was at all indifferent to me. He did, on the other hand, his best for me. Often, when alone,

I would keep looking at my small map of the Globe. This map would bring a great relief to me whenever I felt monotonous during my journey. I would look and look at it and my mind would roam about in the different lands I visited, and many a vivid reminiscence, sad and sweet, would appear irresistibly in my mind. Sometimes I would be reminded of the ill-treatment I had received from many of my beloved countrymen and would naturally become sad, but at the same moment I would feel a thrill of joy in me when I remembered many a sweet and affectionate behaviour I had had the

**In sick-
bed**

privilege to receive from the foreigners. And at times I would become simply overwhelmed with feelings of sorrow to think that I might not be able to see them again in my life—those good souls and friends scattered all over different continents! Looking at the map I would often wonder how I had been able at all to complete a good portion of my world-tour—a tour which I undertook with a paltry sum of only eleven rupees in my pocket—passing through fire and water at home and abroad. A spot on the map is not a mere spot to me. It reminds me of its history and its peoples, the rise and fall of their culture and civilisation and their contributions to the well-being of the world.

After a few days when I came round and got back some strength to stand and pedal, I left, much against the wishes of Mr. Das, my host, for Basrah. The

road was miserably poor ; moreover there were no localities to be found within short distances. All are deserts. Hardly was a tree visible anywhere save and except a kind of leafless trees, very, very small.

It took me full four days to reach Basrah, and so, I had to pass some three nights either in the railway stations or in the wayside villages which lay far away from one another. In these villages I found the people very healthy. Their complexion is dark, although the general complexion of the Iraqians is fair. The ladies have got a beautiful formation of body, and their complexion also is very very attractive.

Enroute to These desert people appear rather
Basrah fanatic and ill-tempered, but at heart they are very kind and hospitable.

I would look at them and often think of the mystery of creation ! There are many people in the world who seem to be polite and kind in their outer appearance, but their behaviour tells a different tale. Again, there are many who appear ferocious and repulsive but win every heart by their inner love and kindness.

It is in this desert that I had a very thrilling experience of my journey. While proceeding on along the railway line in one cool evening, I was suddenly taken by surprise by the boom of a gun. The bullet seemed passing just by my ear. It was all a mystery to me. However, instantly I fell flat on the ground. Immediately followed in quick succession two more fires. And with it a shiver ran through my entire

body. My spirit died within myself to think of my fate. I was now seriously thinking how to escape from the awaiting tragedy when I heard afar some gallops. The sound became more and more prominent and in no time came up some people within a furlong of me. Unable probably to locate me some one of the party switched on his torch-light and found me out at once. Then they talked something amongst themselves which I could not at all follow. I was now lying motionless, but could not stay long in that state. Before long someone came

**A
Thrilling
Experience**

down from his horse and began to approach me. I now sat down lest they should kick me to see if I were dead or alive. Luckily enough, they did me no harm, probably they understood from the signboard on my cycle that I was after all a traveller. They took me to their leader who was staying not very far away from this place. I found there scores of people, well-armed though not in the soldiers' kit. Fortunately for me the leader knew Hindusthani. He asked me who I was. I gave him an account of my travels and also showed him some of my important papers to convince him that I was a bonafide traveller. He now understood me and advised his soldiers to set me at large. He also kindly instructed me not to proceed on by that way at night. Now I heaved a sigh of relief and without loss of time came back direct to the nearest Railway Station. Here I waited to catch the Express

train for Basrah. This place of my accident was not very far from Ur, a big railway junction. At that time an armed conflict was going on between the Government and a Sheikh who, I came to learn, refused allegiance to the King and his Government. The forces of this Sheikh had been carrying on a guerilla warfare for some time past, and at nightfall his soldiers used to fall upon the Government troops. The Government also were sparing no pains to subdue the rebels. The railway authorities therefore suspended running trains at night in order to avoid an attack.

Next day I arrived at Basrah by the Express train. These trains are far better than our Indian trains. The seats in the third class compartments are all clothed with mattress. Then every third class compartment has in it a drinking-water tap. But it is after all very uncomfortable to travel even by trains in the deserts. It is at long distances that the railway stations are to be found, but happily, in many of them Indian employees are seen. I was told that for many years after the War the railway-staff all over the country consisted mainly of Indians. The truth is, without the assistance of the Indians it would be hardly possible for the British to build up railways in Iraq.

It was about 1 P. M. when the train stopped at Basrah. I got down and proceeded straight to Ashar to put up in the Indian Club there. Basrah is not a big city, but it is the biggest port on the Persian Gulf.

The city is divided into three parts, each called by a different name, Mergil, Ashar and Basrah. Mergil is a British Cantonment. Here lie the railway station and the Harbour of Basrah. It is under the direct control of the British military authorities. It is some seven miles off from Ashar. Ashar is the most important town, inhabited mostly by foreigners. It is also the business-centre of Basrah. Here are found all important shops, restaurants, cinema-houses, offices and Banks. A big canal flows through Ashar into the Tigris. Basrah is an old town inhabited exclusively by the natives. It lies at some distance from Ashar. The roads in Mergil and Ashar are all asphalted while those in Basrah are not. While the former towns have a few gardens to boast of, the latter have none.

Basrah It is only during the Great War that the towns of Ashar and Mergil sprang up due mainly to the efforts of the Indian soldiers. During the war the natives of this town fled away to a place of safety leaving the Indian soldiers severely alone to defend their home against the Turks. After the war when the soldiers withdrew from Ashar to Mergil, the civilians began to pour in and settle there. With what keen interest I used to hear many a day of the heroic fight of the Indian soldiers in the battle-field, and how proud I would feel of them ! But alas, it is all for others ! Whenever I come across an Indian soldier, I am at once reminded of the courage and chivalry of our soldiers, but recall at the same time the words of

a famous international figure who once feelingly remarked that the Indians knew how to fight well for others but not for themselves. What, indeed, can be more pitiable ! As a matter of fact, the Indians have done not a little for the advancement of Iraq ; it is they who greatly helped the Iraqians to achieve their long-desired freedom—a thing which it would be difficult for them to attain so easily if in the Ottoman Empire. But, so short is human memory that the Iraqians have now clean forgotten their past and have learnt to hate the Indians to whom they ought to be ever grateful ! They are now raising walls and walls of limitations to make it too uncomfortable for the Indians to stay in their country. Such indeed is the irony of fate !

I had been in Basrah for three days, the first day I spent in the Indian Club. Next day one Mr. P. P. Nag, an amiable Bengalee, wished me most earnestly to stay with him, and I could not but respect his wish. Here also as in Baghdad I had to address, on special request, a gathering of my countrymen on my itinerary. They appreciated me highly, and in token of their love and affection they presented me in the meeting with a purse. Besides some employees in different offices here, there are many Indian merchants too. The thing which delighted me most here was a relationship of sweet harmony and fellow-feeling prevailing amongst all Indians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians.

After passing three days in Basrah I left again for Baghdad. This return journey by the Express-train took me nearly twelve hours. On my return to the capital I put up again with Mr. Das. On the same day of my arrival was organised a great demonstration in the city to voice forth the protest of the people against the partition of Palestine. *Hartal* was observed in the city, and in the afternoon a big procession was taken out, terminating in a protest-meeting. I was told, it was the only protest-meeting held in Baghdad since the partition of Palestine was proposed by the British Government.

In the evening Mr. Das and Mr. Mazumdar took me to the city to see an Indian film. The Indians here are naturally eager to see an Indian picture. We got ourselves booked for first class which cost us seventy-five fils each. The cinema-hall looked decent and was quite modern in style. The picture which we saw was not of a high standard, but the story was appealing indeed ! The picture represented the ideal character of an Indian wife who would not utter a single word of protest even when brutally oppressed by her husband. She suffered and suffered in silence ! One night she was brutally beaten to unconsciousness by her cruel husband. But still she did not desert her husband, not even then when her father and brother came to persuade her to live with them. However, at length the ideal character of the girl, her devoted love and silent sufferings

**An Indian
Picture**

brought about a wholesome change in the character of her husband, resulting in their happy conjugal life. These virtues in the character of the girl, characteristic of Indian womanhood, seemed to appeal most to my friends and even to the Iraqians. But frankly speaking, I never like that the women should be so unreasonably submissive to their husbands.

The show over, we came out of the hall and entered a restaurant for dinner which was very simple, consisting of *Polao*, fish-curry and some vegetable-preparations. Like the Iranians the Arabs also are very fond of curds and watermelon.

Iraqian Food Their staple food is rice ; but they take bread also. The Arabs relish fish curries.

They also take some green vegetables (uncooked) and fruits along with their food. Their process of cooking is not much different from ours. The Arabs use spices in their curries just as we.

It was the 17th of July, 1937. About two weeks had meanwhile elapsed since my arrival in Baghdad. Much of my time here I used to spend in visiting the historical places, interviewing the prominent people, delivering lectures in schools and addressing public meetings, and last but not least, in chatting and playing—playing cards, chess and dice with my friends. In the meantime I had sufficiently recouped my health, and so decided once for all to leave Baghdad for Damascus. In between Baghdad and Damas lies a vast desert extending over long seven hundred miles with practically no locality

on the way. And what was worse, there was no road whatever leading to Damas across the desert. But still I was determined to cross it at any cost. In the previous night some of my Indian friends called at my place and wanted me to give the idea up. They held that it was practically a day-dream for anybody to try to go on his bike through this land of no man. They did not also forget to remind me in this connection of the tragic end of many in their attempt to cross the deserts. Not that I was unaware of such facts, as I myself also read a news of that kind in the "*Iraq Times*", the only English daily in Baghdad. The whole story made a very pathetic reading.

Tragic end I remember, I was so moved that tears
of some rolled down my cheeks as I read the
adventurous story of those unfortunate youngmen
youngmen in involved in the tragedy. One morning
a desert some youngmen left Baghdad for Syria
by a motor-car. After the day's journey

they understood that they had taken a wrong course. So they got down from the car and began to walk on to find out some trace of road, but unfortunately no trace of a road could they find after walking even ten miles or so. Therefore they then decided to go back to their car, but alas! this time also they lost their way. They walked and walked for almost the whole night, but still could not succeed in locating their car. Fatigued and disgusted they at last sat down in utter despair. Next day also they made an attempt to trace their car, but in vain.

Thirst and starvation now brought their vitality to an end. And after five days they were found dead by the Police. Thus ended in that dreary desert the careers of those adventurous youngmen ! Such news naturally makes one's blood cold, but it could not deter me from my grim determination. I set aside the advice of my friends and stuck to my own decision. Accordingly, on the morning of the 17th July I bade good-bye to my friends after taking my breakfast with my host Mr. Das and rode on my bike. I had with me a suit-case placed on the carrier of my cycle, in which I had taken enough provisions and water to stand the journey. I had also taken some extra parts of a cycle and some necessary instruments for repairing the cycle if necessary.

Soon I reached Baghdad. When I came to the foot of the Maud bridge, a restaurant was just opening its doors. I entered it to have a cup of tea, after which I began my journey again across the bridge.

Good-bye, After pedalling for sometime along an
Baghdad ! asphalted road I came now before a
desert. There was no trace of road
visible anywhere beyond the place
where I now stopped to know what
direction to take. In this desert came to my notice
nothing but some small sandy and rocky hills, one
here and another there. Then came suddenly an
auto-car from behind and passed away by my side.
I followed it and proceeding some distance found
certain traces of the running cars. I took this way and

began to advance sometimes on foot and sometimes on cycle.

With the passage of time I began to feel the sun bitter and bitter. There was no road whatever, and moreover the desert was full of camel-thorns. A camel-thorn is a very small tree containing no leaf but innumerable small delicate prickles all over its body. The camels of the deserts feed on these trees, and hence probably is the name of the tree. It grows in abundance in the deserts and is used as fuel by the desert-people ; besides, it is the food of their domestic animals, sheep and goats. It was along such fields of camel-thorns that I began to cycle on merely by physical strength. The result was, I often fell down and had some bruises here and there on my body. I now felt really disgusted to push on any further and remembered the words of my friends who warned me again and again not to be so reckless as to undertake the journey. I repented why I did not listen to them.

In the afternoon I reached a small village called Ramadi where lies the Customs Office of the Iraquian Government. Here, my passport and the suit-case were examined, after which I was
Ramadi allowed to leave the country. I was too tired to push on any more. So, I stopped for the night in a hotel beside the Customs House. This is a village of some thirty or forty families. The people are very poor. Most of them live in small mud-built houses, before many of which I found fruit trees, mostly vine. Like date-trees, vine

also grows in abundance in Iraq. The Iraqi grapes are bigger and very, very juicy. They represent probably the best quality of grapes in the world. They are cheap too. A seer of grapes sells in season for only eight or ten fils (about two annas). The Iraqi date also is famous all the world over. They are very big and juicy. Its seed is very small. I am sure, once a man takes it, he won't forget it—so sweet, indeed, it is!

The fields surrounding the village are absolutely barren. The villagers have, therefore, to subsist upon food-stuffs supplied from Baghdad. The only source of income of the people is their sheep and goats. For drinking water they depend on tube-wells.

Early next morning I resumed my journey after paying my hotel-charge amounting to two hundred and fifty fils. This morning I felt fresh and forgot all my tedium of the previous day's journey. Indeed, I was very jolly and cheerful, and was as determined as before to cross the desert. I was now full of hope. And an ardent desire to make my venture a success began to inspire me with fresh courage. Soon I came to the outskirts of the village and ere long found myself in the dreary desert again. As I advanced further, I found under construction a new road to Damas. I followed this road. Motor-buses run to Damas by this way twice a week, and that was evident from the traces of car. The way was scattered over with stones, small and big. So long my impression was that a

desert is a vast sandy expanse where the highest temperature prevails. But now I had to revise my old impression, as I noticed in this desert only rocky soil and mostly rocky hills. The temperature also seemed not so high. It was probably between 105° & 110°. But why the heat is so keenly felt by the travellers is because they do not find any tree to take shelter under. However, I began to proceed on and on now walking, now pedalling. In the morning I came across some Arabs who also were going towards Damas on camels. I did not know exactly their destination, as I could not understand them when they spoke.

It was now mid-day. Extremely fatigued and hungry, I sat on a big piece of stone for repose. There was the scorching sun above and no shadow of a tree in sight. After a little rest I ate my lunch and started again. Even after the whole day's journey I could not quite understand how far I had progressed. In the evening when the day's light had faded away altogether, I decided to stop and arranged to stay in the field. I spread one of my two blankets to lie down upon. As for my pillow, there was the suit-case. Now the cool evening breeze was blowing which removed all my fatigue and I felt fresh and energetic again. These deserts get cold at nightfall and a cool breeze blows. Even in a summer night one experiences such cold in these deserts that it becomes extremely difficult for him to pass the night without warm wrappers. However, after a long rest I took my

dinner consisting of bread and butter and some sugar. After meal I lay down almost immediately and fell fast asleep. Alone and unfriended, I thus spent my first night in this desert under the blue canopy of the sky, and thanked God heartily for the quiet rest.

Early next morning I rose up, and without caring to wash my hands and face, as that meant waste of water, I took my breakfast and hastened to pack up things to ride on my bike. I was shivering from cold even then. I pushed on and on and was very hopeful of my success in this adventure. But as it was approaching mid-day, I began to feel more and more thirsty. Now and then dust-storms arose around me and much dust entered my nostrils. Captured by such dust-storms I became rather overwhelmed with a peculiar fear—fear to find myself helpless in this too hot endless desert.

Now it was about one. I was suffering from an unquenchable thirst. My throat went almost dry. My water-flask also contained little water. As I had no occasion previously to cross such big deserts, I could not make a correct estimate of the quantity of water and provisions required for the purpose. I did not at all think that the water I brought with me would be exhausted within so short a time. Finding no other alternative to quench my thirst I took up at last to my lips my almost empty flask, but only a few drops of water fell rolling down to my throat, which went to increase my unquenchable thirst all the more. My condition at this stage is simply

indescribable ; I was about to collapse. I had no strength left in me to walk a step further. I felt restless. The sun appeared too hot for me. Right and left, ahead and back of me—all around I found flames of fire ! Death seemed inevitable for want of a drop of water—a drop of water only ! At this moment I chanced to notice a huge lake at some distance. I rubbed my eyes to see if I had not mistaken, but no, I saw the same thing. Small waves were clearly visible on the water. I noticed innumerable green trees around the lake. And what

Myself—a

Victim of

Mirage

was wondering still, some sheep and goats seemed to be drinking water. This picture of the water reminded me of a mirage of which I had read and heard so often, but at the same moment I thought, this might be real water as I found in some other deserts. I had also heard, while in Baghdad, of a lake lying somewhere near the capital in the desert. Then who could say that it was not real water ? To make sure I rubbed my eyes again, but it was the same picture again ! How attractive indeed ! Now I was thoroughly convinced that it was real water. At once I decided to proceed on to the place. I felt a new strength and energy pulsating through my veins and totally forgot that I was at all tired. What a strong desire to live ! Leaving my cycle on the spot I began to approach in rapid steps towards the water as if I were a hypnotised man. But how strange, after a long walk

even I could not be nearer the water. It was as far as before. Now I got disheartened, but at the same moment a new hope again nerved me to proceed further on. I argued with myself that the water seemed so near was probably because it was in an open field. So, I walked on again with redoubled energy, but stranger still, I could not approach nearer even after a long, long walk. The more I advanced, the more the water seemed to recede back. Now, I became convinced that it was a mirage that lures many a traveller to death. Therefore I decided to go back to my cycle to await the inevitable consequences. By this time my strength was almost exhausted ; I could not even stand perfectly. Still I began to walk back with infirm steps just like a drunkard. My mind now hankered to see once again my beloved relations and friends who surely were longing to see me back in their midst. I also remembered those well-wishers who warned me again and again against undertaking such a venture. Oh, if I listened to them ! But I could not think for long. Before I came back to my cycle, I stumbled down unconscious. I do not know exactly how long I had been in that state of unconsciousness, but when I came to my senses, I found myself lying on earth and my head and clothes wet with water. A kind lady was fanning my head and around me stood a number of people anxiously looking on. I found also a motor-bus standing close by. Now, when I found myself in such condition, I felt within me an urge to say my thanks to all those kind



The road from Damascus to Beirut.
The barren hills show the territory of Syria while the green hills
show the territory of Libanon.

people, but couldn't. After drinking some cold water I seemed to get back some strength to speak, but for ignorance of languages we remained curiosities to one another.

They took me into their bus. My cycle and the suit-case also were picked up. These motor-buses ply between Baghdad and Damas twice a week. These are all desert-proof buses. Every bus has got a water-tank on its roof and it is so constructed

Desert-proof that it can't be distinguished from
Bus outside. A water pipe runs down from the tank to the driver's place, and hence the passengers find no difficulty to drink water even when the bus is in motion. There are two kinds of buses, small and big. A small bus can accommodate some sixteen or seventeen passengers while a big one can accommodate some twenty-six or twenty-seven. Every passenger gets for his seat a cushioned easy-chair with a cushioned pillow affixed to rest his head upon. So, the passengers have not to feel much discomforts during their non-stop journey for long thirty hours.

After a long rest I took some bread and butter with some fruits and now I began to feel better. I was gradually recovering from weakness and exhaustion. Our bus ran on and on and at last reached Rutba, the Iraqi frontier, in the evening. I came to new life indeed !

Rutba is a small village in the middle of this vast desert. Its people are very poor. Like other desert-

people they also have to depend on provisions supplied from Baghdad. They live upon their income derived from the sale of their sheep, goats and camels. Most

Rutba

of the houses are built of mud and date-leaves, but the condition of many of them is such that they can hardly give the house-owners sufficient protection from sun and shower. I found some people here who had practically no houses. They built something like a camp with a few torn blankets, and in them they passed their weary days. Their belongings are but few. These people do not settle permanently in a place. They move from place to place across the deserts with their flocks of sheep, goats and camels to sell. I wonder how they know their way in the deserts.

This village, though small, is a very noted place in Iraq. It is an important frontier of this country by which one has to pass for going to Damas. Here ends the boundary of Iraq. It contains a military barrack, an aerodrome, a post office with a wireless department and a Police-station. It is also the halting station of all motor-buses which ply between Damas and Baghdad. Here the passports of all people leaving and entering the country are examined. Although there is much passenger-traffic in this village, there is no restaurant or hotel here worth the name. When I was there, it had only a small tea-shop where nothing but green tea could be had.

SYRIA
&
LIBANON

Syria

It was now about eight. The bus-driver gave a horn and with it all the passengers who were loitering about hastened to get in. By this time about two hours had passed away and a thick darkness had enveloped the earth. The bus now began to move, and I bade my good-bye to Iraq. In our bus there were people of different nationalities—Iraqians, Syrians, Turks and English, but the majority were Iraqians. For most of the time the passengers remained silent as if they were conserving their strength to stand the tedium of the journey. The bus began to run at a high speed. It had powerful lights to make the way distinctly visible, but still we experienced at times such terrible jerks that often we were thrown up from our seats to dash against the roof. However, one by one almost all fell asleep and so also myself. After a long time I woke up and to my surprise found the car motionless. I came out and asked the driver what had happened. "A tire has burst out, sir," replied the driver. This reminded me at once of a popular Bengali saying, 'Even the Ocean dries up when a poor fellow approaches it to drink water.' While I was so anxious to reach Damas earlier, came this disheartening news. Fortunately enough, the driver did not take too long time to affix a new tire.

It was early hours of the morning when we reached the Syrian Customs House lying some forty miles away from Damas. Here our passports and baggages were examined. The Customs' officials seemed rather liberal in the matter. It did not take them more than

an hour to examine our things after which we were permitted to enter Syria and Libanon. I had taken a French visa in my passport for these countries from the French Consulate in Baghdad. A visa is required by a British subject intending to enter the French Colonies, although to enter France no visa is required by him. Two kinds of visa are issued—the general visa entitles the possessor to stay on as long as he likes while the transit visa is valid for fourteen days only.

The examination of our passports and belongings being over we left the place. After about an hour's journey we now found ourselves in new environments. Damas was still some fifteen or twenty miles ahead. The road was now an asphalted one. Green fields with trees and crops began to greet us from right and left and small villages at short distances began to appear. Hawkers, both male and female, made their appearance, some hawking vegetables and some fish, and now and then came to sight many a farmer going to his fields with his yoke of bullocks. This changed aspect of nature for which I was longing at heart relieved to a great extent the monotony of my eyes and how delighted I felt now ! By the side of our road

I found a railway over which the electric trains were running. I was rather filled with wonder to see the electric trains running in this small country of an estimated population of a million or so. I did not come across electric trains anywhere in the East save and except in Bombay, Madras and Japan. I was all the more surprised when I found in this country of deserts motor-trains running regularly between Aleppo and Homs,—a thing which I saw only in Europe.

It was about eight when we arrived at Damascus. It was the 20th day of July, 1938. After coming out of the motor-garage I began to walk on towards the clock-tower along the left bank of a small river flowing through the city. As I came near the river, I found a huge crowd of people going on towards the same tower. It was all a scenery of red Fej caps. One seldom comes across this favourite cap of the Muslims elsewhere in the near east, because out of Iran and Turkey it has been banished once for all and in Iraq too most of the people have lost fancy to it. So, when I noticed this luxury of fej caps here, naturally I thought that it had at last found shelter in this country. It is also here in this near east that I acquired quite a different knowledge of the Muslims. While in my country, it was always my impression that a pure Muslim was he who wore a *loongee* with a fej cap on his head and who kept beard, but now I had to revise my old impression after travelling in these Muslim countries, because these Muslims neither wear *loongee* nor do they wear any beard.

Most of the revered Muslim priests even, I saw, go without beard. Of course, the social customs and manners of the people always differ in different places. As for example, the Hindus of Bengal do not favour *loongee* while the Hindus of South India do. While the Hindus in Bengal are mostly non-vegetarians, the rest of the Hindu India are strict vegetarians ; while the Bengalee Brahmins regard it as a sacrilege to take two meals before sun-set, the rest of Brahmin India do not ; the Hindu women of Northern India do not generally appear before a stranger with unveiled face (of course, there has been, of late, some change in the outlook of our modern women and so it does not apply so much to the educated section of the women), Hindu women of South India do not care to put on any cloth whatever on their heads in or out of their homes. Thus, very many other differences are noticed in the customs and manners of the people professing the same faith but inhabiting different places.

However, unable to proceed on through the huge crowd I got down from my cycle and began to make my way through. Most of the people were in European costume which they have adopted as their own. As I was walking on through this crowd, I noticed a feeling of discontent on almost every face. They looked angry and many of them were armed with small iron-rods and *lathees*. So, I got a little afraid. I took it for a demonstration against the partition of Palestine. I apprehended lest anyone should strike me down out of a misunderstanding to take

revenge upon the British ! So, in order to leave the crowd behind I tried to accelerate steps, but it was impossible to make any progress through this crowd.

**A Demon-
stration**

Needless to tell that my heart was palpitating all the while with fear. While passing by the clock-tower I found several speakers making violent speeches to the agitated mob, their words being cheered up now and then with applauses. I noticed also a contingent of armed police there. Of course, every police in Syria is armed with a revolver.

However, soon I entered into a middle class hotel located on a small street near the Tower, and as soon as I got in my room, I was startled to hear some rifle-shots. This hotel was a three-storeyed house, and I was accommodated on the top floor. It cost me daily twenty Piastres [100 Piastres = 1 Livre. About Livres 6/70 Piastres = £1 (sterling) = Rs 13/5/4p.].

**Syrian
Police—
their sense
of Duty**

The rifle-shots brought me immediately to the balcony of the hotel when I found the crowd dispersed and the people running amuck. In the twinkling of an eye the whole street and the open space below my hotel were filled up with people ; it looked a vast sea of heads. The police also followed them. In front of my hotel lay a heap of small broken stones ; with these stones the crowd now charged the police, as a result of which many of them got injured. Instantly arrived on the scene a party of armed police.

Most of them were Syrians and the rest were French. Their left hands were covered with tin-plates for protecting their head and face against the shower of stones. But still the pelting of stones did not cease. The police were running after the people who were throwing stones upon them, and at times they were firing blank shots to frighten them, but yet they could not have the desired effect, because whenever the mob understood that these were mere blank shots, they fell upon the police with more fury and strength. Stone-throwing followed from every nook and corner, as a result of which many a glass-window on the scene fell broken. Once a stone hit a police who lost temper and at once raised his rifle to shoot down the man who was almost within his grip, but before he aimed at the man, two of his comrades, one a French and the other a Syrian, instantly appeared before him ; one caught hold of his hand while the other placed himself before his rifle to dissuade him from the action. This spirit of tolerance and sense of duty of the police filled me with wonder. I thought that no praise was too much for these police. Indeed, they might be the boast of any country. I kept watching and watching just to see what turn the matter ultimately took. The policeman who was hit could not be pacified, he was roaring with rage, so he was removed from the scene by his comrades.

Stone-throwing continued till about three in the afternoon when normal condition was restored. I was

really struck with wonder to see the generous mentality of the soldiers who did not resort to any firing even under such provocation, nay, on the other hand they let off only with a verbal warning even those who were caught red-handed. Towards the evening when the city appeared quite peaceful, I became curious to know of the real facts that led to such disturbances. On enquiry I learnt that Palestine-problem had nothing to do with the

<p>Guardians of Peace in India & Guardians of Peace in Syria</p>	<p>demonstration, it was all for a new tax imposed on bread by the Government. "A tempest in a tea-pot!"—that is what I remarked within myself, but in this connection I was reminded of one such demonstration that took place in Calcutta when under almost equal, if not lesser, provocation the soldiers treated the public most brutally. It</p>
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was in 1930. A *hartal* was organised in Calcutta as a protest against the arrest of a very popular leader of India during the Civil Disobedience movement. On that day a tram was burnt to ashes in Bhawanipur by some people when the tram-driver refused to comply with the request of the people of the locality to observe *hartal*. In that evening stones were thrown on the cars of some Europeans resulting in the arrival of a contingent of armed police who, without caring to enquire who was who, began to beat the people mercilessly. They did not stop there, they even entered some houses on the street by breaking open

the doors just to beat the innocent occupants.* So when I witnessed this violent demonstration in Damas and the remarkable patience and sense of duty of the police, I thought and thought what it would come to if such a demonstration was organised in India! What a striking contrast, indeed, between the guardians of peace in India and the guardians of peace here in Syria!

The hotel where I took shelter had no restaurant in it. I had, therefore, to take my meals in the restaurants outside. But here also, as elsewhere, I had to experience the same language difficulty—a thing for which I could not make myself understood to the waiters about my requirements. So I had to be contented, while here, with only *polao* and *kebab* which alone I could speak in their tongue. These Syrians take rice and bread just as the Iraqians. Their process of cooking, their social customs and manners are also much the same as their neighbours, the people of Iraq. Almost all are Muslims in this country.

In the evening while taking a stroll through the main business street, I suddenly heard, much to my surprise, the voice of an Indian behind. I turned round and found an Indian following me. When he came to me, we both walked on along the road talking on miscellaneous subjects. From his talks I came to gather that he had little information about the

* I was an eye-witness of this incident, as I was staying in this locality at that time.

recent happenings in India, and it is because no Indian news is published in the foreign newspapers except on rare occasions. When I was in Damas, there were only two well-to-do Indian merchants in addition to a few other Indians living in the city. These merchants hailed from Sindh. They had been there for many years. The Sindhees are probably the most enterprising traders of India, found in almost every port of the world.

Next morning I called at the Italian Consulate to know if I required any visa at all for visiting Italy. On my entrance into the Consulate I happened to meet a young Italian Fascist who received me most courteously and took me to his office. He was an employee in the Consulate. He informed me that a British subject required no visa to enter their country. Then casting a glance at my

In the Italian passport he brightened up and exclaimed with some delight, "Oh, you are an
Consulate Indian, I see!" And almost in the same breath he said, "I like Indians very much. They are very intelligent people. There are many great men in India, I know. At present we are watching with keen interest the Indian struggle for independence going on under the leadership of Mr. Gandhi. Mr. Gandhi is a great man—is he not?" I said "Yes, not only great,—very great, probably the greatest man living." I then asked him with a smile, "Is it that you are watching with keen interest the Indian struggle? I hope, it is not with that kind of keen interest

that urged you to civilise the Abyssinians." He burst into a loud laugh and replied, "Oh! no, my dear." After exchange of some more words I seriously asked him if he was for war at all, to which he replied, "Well, my friend! frankly speaking, personally I never like war. A war destroys at a stroke the grand civilisations which are built up after centuries of labour. But still when I am called upon to take part in a war by my country, I do so; I sacrifice my personal opinion at the altar of my country's interest. Last year along with other Fascists I also had to go to Abyssinia to fight against the Ethiopians, but my joy knew no bounds when after Military examination I was declared unfit and sent back to Italy along with some four hundred Italians who also were found unfit. Indeed, I heaved a sigh of relief and I was so glad not to see the horrors of the war." In his office room I found the oil-paintings of H. M. the King and the Queen of Italy, but I did not find there any photo of their Duce. It appeared a bit unusual to me, so I asked him why they did not care to keep a photo of their leader the Duce in the office. To this he replied with a smile "You know, God is invisible and so also is our leader, the Duce." So saying he laughed for a while and then turned serious. He said, "To many of us our Duce is more than God." In course of talks he paid a glowing tribute to Mussolini, their great leader. I now stood up to say him good-bye when he gave me some pamphlets all regarding Italy and assured me of a warm reception in their

country. He also told me that they would be writing about me to their Government.

Early next morning I started on my bike for Aleppo lying near the Turkish border. It stands surrounded by all deserts. It is not very far off from Damas. On my way to Aleppo I came across some villages, some of which appeared rather novel to me. The houses in all these villages are of a peculiar type, unseen in any other country. They are all mud-built. Their outlook is somewhat like that of Hindu temples with tapering tops. I noticed no window in them, and so I thought how woeful it must be to live huddled together in these houses; but it may be that the rooms keep cool when it is too hot outside.

Aleppo claims to be the second city in Syria. It has a population of some fifty thousand. Its roads are asphalted and very clean. The buildings too are of modern style. It is an important railway junction.

After a day's stay here I returned to Damas, and this return journey I made partly by a motor-train and partly by a railway taxi which took me altogether nearly six hours to reach the capital.

Damas is the capital of the Syrian Republic. While the population of the Republic is only a million or so, the population of Damas alone is some two hundred thousand. It is a French Protectorate. The city may be rightly proud of a museum and some historical mosques. The Museum preserves some materials of great archeological importance. It contains the Synagogue. The entire Old Testament is painted on

the walls of the building. It was done in the 3rd century A. D., but it is still wonderfully preserved. In this museum lies also the tomb of Palmyrenian, dating back to the 2nd century A. D. But one thing need be told here ; it is very difficult for the non-French-speaking visitors to understand the historical things. Because every note attached to the things is

in French. Of course, interpreters are
Museum available. Being a non-Mohammedan
 & I was refused access into the famous
Mosques Omyad Mosque. I could not therefore
 have an idea of its grand architecture

of which I heard so much. There are many other mosques besides in Iraq and Syria which also are not open to the non-Muslims. This city is a famous pilgrimage of the Muslim World, and so it is visited every year by thousands of Muslims who come from far and near for the purpose.

Damas is a modern city. It stands on a number of hills. The buildings are big and modern. The streets also are all asphalted and they are kept very neat and clean. With rows of trees on either side and gardens

in the middle the streets present a
Damascus lovely picture indeed ! There are a
 number of high class hotels in the

city. A stream flows through the heart of the city, which lends an additional charm to the capital. The whole city is interspersed with tramway lines, and there are motor-buses running all over the city. Damas is also the most important traffic junction

in the near east. From this city run regularly motor-buses to Palestine, Iraq and Libanon. It is also the terminus of the railway which leads to the Continent through Turkey.

It was the 24th of July. Early morning after breakfast I set out for Beirut, lying some fifty miles away from Damas. The entire road is asphalted and on both sides of it stand rows of trees. The way is mountaineous, but the lovely scenery that occurs on the way is simply charming to the traveller. After an hour or two I came to meet some students of the American College of Beirut who also were going on cycle towards the same. These students knew English. I could guess from their looks that I was a curiosity to them. They approached me to ask how I had come all the way from my country to theirs simply on a bike. I told them how, and thus we became

almost intimate. In course of talks they

Libanon asked me several questions regarding the system of education in India and by the way also regarding students' organisations. I said all I knew about them, and myself also felt tempted to ask them some questions regarding the French administration in Syria and Libanon. In reply they said, "Well, Syria and Libanon are two separate Republics, although they were identical sometime ago. The administration of these two Republics are vested in the people, but they have practically no control over the foreign and the military affairs which are controlled by the French authorities.

Strategically these Republics occupy the most important position. They are the military stations of France as Iraq is of the British. Of course, these Republics are small. The population of Libanon is only 860,000. Now, with this meagre strength what can we do against a great military power? Even if we succeed in throwing off the French yoke, we can't remain under the present circumstances independent with such scanty resources of our country. You can well see that we are surrounded on all sides by greedy Imperialists like Italy, Britain and Turkey. Of course, in comparison with the Italians, the English and the Turks, the French are admittedly far more liberal in their political views and more lenient in their rule. Under the French administration we enjoy to a great extent freedom in all matters, but for this let it not be thought that we prefer to remain slaves, that we do not want to be independent. We are politically as conscious as other countries. Although no organised movement for freedom has yet seen the light of the day, the day is not far off when the growing discontent of the people may seek expression through a country-wide agitation followed by a revolt for independence." Thus discussing on politics I went on with them and soon reached the top of a mountain. Here ends the boundary of the Syrian Republic and begins the boundary of the Libanon Republic. There is a signboard here which indicates with arrows the respective boundaries of the two Republics. Here my accompanying friends exclaimed, "Just see the contrast

between Syria and Liban ! The Syrian lands are all barren while the lands of Liban are so green with vegetation." My friends did not in the least magnify, I too was simply charmed to see the green lands of Liban. As far as my eyes could survey, I found hills and hills all green.

Soon we came down the mountain to a big valley, and here I found myself amidst lovely sceneries. On all sides of me were fields green with crops, and on the surrounding hills afar many villages and small towns attracted my eyes. The scenery was marvellous, and seldom had I come across one such elsewhere. In fact, I could not remember any that could be compared to it. I was reminded of Switzerland alone which, I had read and heard, excelled all other countries in natural beauty, but I had not seen the place till then. The place enjoys an ideal climate which accounts for the influx of patients and health-seekers to the place. It is for this reason that many a sanatorium has sprung up all over the country. However, after cycling for some time we now reached a small town at the foot of the mountain and here we parted—my friends went home and myself entered a big hotel for lunch. This hotel was packed mostly with European visitors and health-seekers. Just in front of the hotel lay a garden of big shady trees under which were placed the dining tables and chairs. On one of them I took my seat for lunch and was promptly served. A little while after arrived there a number of motor-buses carrying a large number of passengers

and instantly all the vacant seats were occupied by them. All throughout the day motor-buses and taxicabs run between Beirut and Damas. The distance between is fifty miles, but the fare is rather cheap. It is only fifty Piastres by a bus and only one Livre by a taxi.

After an hour's rest I resumed my journey. It was with great difficulties that I now began to ascend the mountain. I went up sometimes cycling and sometimes walking. On the way I came across many small towns which lay all the way over almost adjoining to one another. These towns looked very neat and clean and from the houses standing one could not say that any poor man lived therein. Most of them were *pucca* houses with tiled roofs. While ascending this mountain I did not, curiously enough, feel much fatigued, although ascending mountains is very, very tiresome. From the top I

Beirut saw with great delight the wonderful panorama of Beirut which yet lay a few miles off down the mountain on the Mediterranean. It gave me indeed great delight now to cycle down the mountain. It was 4 P. M. when I reached Beirut and entered "Hotel Safa" on the Suk Sursuk Street running through the heart of the city. A bed in this hotel cost me fifty Piastres only per day. Yonder lay a municipal garden with a big fountain in the middle. In front of the garden stands a small monument erected by the French Government to commemorate their occupation of the country. This is the



Beirut



An Armenian family, Hamadan, Iran.

most important locality where are found all important shops and restaurants, cinema-houses and dancing-halls, hotels and tea-houses, Banks and offices. The city has a population of more than two hundred thousand. It contains a number of palatial buildings besides a museum and the lovely sea-beach. The roads are all asphalted and kept quite clean. It is a noted sea-port. It is also an important educational centre in the near east. The city is proud of its famous American college which is the only English college in Libanon, Syria and Iraq. The college stands on a magnificent site facing the sea. For communication there are trams and motor-buses running all over the city.

In the evening while going to the sea-beach I heard, greatly to my surprise, a sudden call from behind. Turning round I noticed an Indian calling me from the door of his shop. I went to him. He received me very cordially and treated me to cold-drink. We both then set out for a evening stroll. From him I came to learn that they were only two Indian families there. Both the families hailed from Sindh.

It was not yet dusk when we arrived at the sea-shore. We walked on and on along the beach-road till we came before a Sea-bathing Club. Many such clubs, I found, have sprung up along the shore to provide good facilities for swimming. In many places breakwaters have been created to help the novices to swim without any risk or accident. Every club-house has in it different dressing-

rooms for the ladies and gentlemen. When we came, we found the shore crowded from one end to the other with a large number of visitors, both male and female. Here also I came across many young Muslim couples taking strolls in cross-arms, but these ladies, though dressed in European costume, had thin veils on—a feature by which alone they could be distinguished from the Christian women. Indeed, the majority of the population of Libanon are Christians, both in faith and manners. Hence, while I was here, I could hardly feel that I was after all in an Asiatic country. It is here in Beirut and Beirut alone that I saw for the first time ladies and gentlemen in their swimming costume taking their baths freely side by side. The Syrians are very fair in complexion. Looking at these ladies who were enjoying life so merrily with absolutely no sign of worries on their faces, my mind at once went back to India where ladies look different with their pale faces and who pass their days within a limited space enjoying a strictly restricted liberty. Right or wrong, I now strongly felt that this was probably the reason why the Indian ladies in general lagged behind their sisters in other countries in almost every sphere of life. However, after stopping for some time in the place we moved onward. This long shore has been built up with stones direct from the sea. Along the shore stand high class hotels, restaurants and cabarets. It is a lovely beach indeed ! It remains crowded with people till very late hours of the night. On this beach is found a small monu-

ment erected by the French to commemorate their occupation of Beirut.

Next morning I called on the Minister of Education who received me very cordially in his office. I was promptly treated to tea. As he was ignorant of English, he sent for an English-knowing person of his office, but the gentleman who was supposed to know English had, I found, not even a smattering of the language, and so he could not be of any service to us. I had therefore to retire at last to my lodge, sorry and disappointed. For my ignorance of French I had to face such difficulties almost everywhere in the Near East and also in Europe.

In the evening I attended, on invitation, a meeting organised under the auspices of a Youth League to speak on my experiences of travel. The meeting was organised on a marvellous site ; it was near the American college. The gathering was fairly large, it consisted mostly of students, both male and female. I spoke for about an hour

Tagore	and a half about my adventures and
&	also of the economic and political
Gandhi	conditions of different lands I visited.

After the lecture was over, the students put to me many pertinent questions, particularly regarding the two great sons of India—Tagore and Gandhi. Tagore has a great influence over the students everywhere. He has been known to them for a long time through his literature. Mahatmaji's name is a house-hold word in this country, but very

few people know much of him. To most of the people he is known as the greatest patriot of India who has revolted against the mighty British rule. After the meeting some students approached me for my autograph. I gladly obliged them all.

While here, I used to take my meals in a small restaurant located below my hotel. Here I would get nice food. Often I used to take here *Payash* (a sort of milk-preparation, very delicious to taste, containing milk, sugar and rice). It is highly relished by the Arabs, the Syrians, the Turks and the Bulgarians just like the Bengalees. It is prepared in the same manner as is done in Bengal. It is very cheap too. About half a pound of it cost me only three Piastres.

It was in this city that I finally decided upon leaving for Europe. Accordingly I took a visa for Greece and began to wait in eager expectation for a boat to leave for Greece on the 27th of July. Europe was a daily dream of my boyhood. Now I felt a thrill of joy to think that the dream of my boyhood was going to materialise.

END

Read

Turkey in "My Impressions of the West."

ERRATUM

<i>Page</i>	<i>Line</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Please read</i>
55	25	'innocent'	'ignorant'
59	17	'beheaded then and there'	'severely dealt with'

